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A HI-TECH POWERHOUSE ON TEST

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"YOU WANT TO SEE SERIOUS BASS PLAYING? WATCH THIS!"

GOOD TIMES

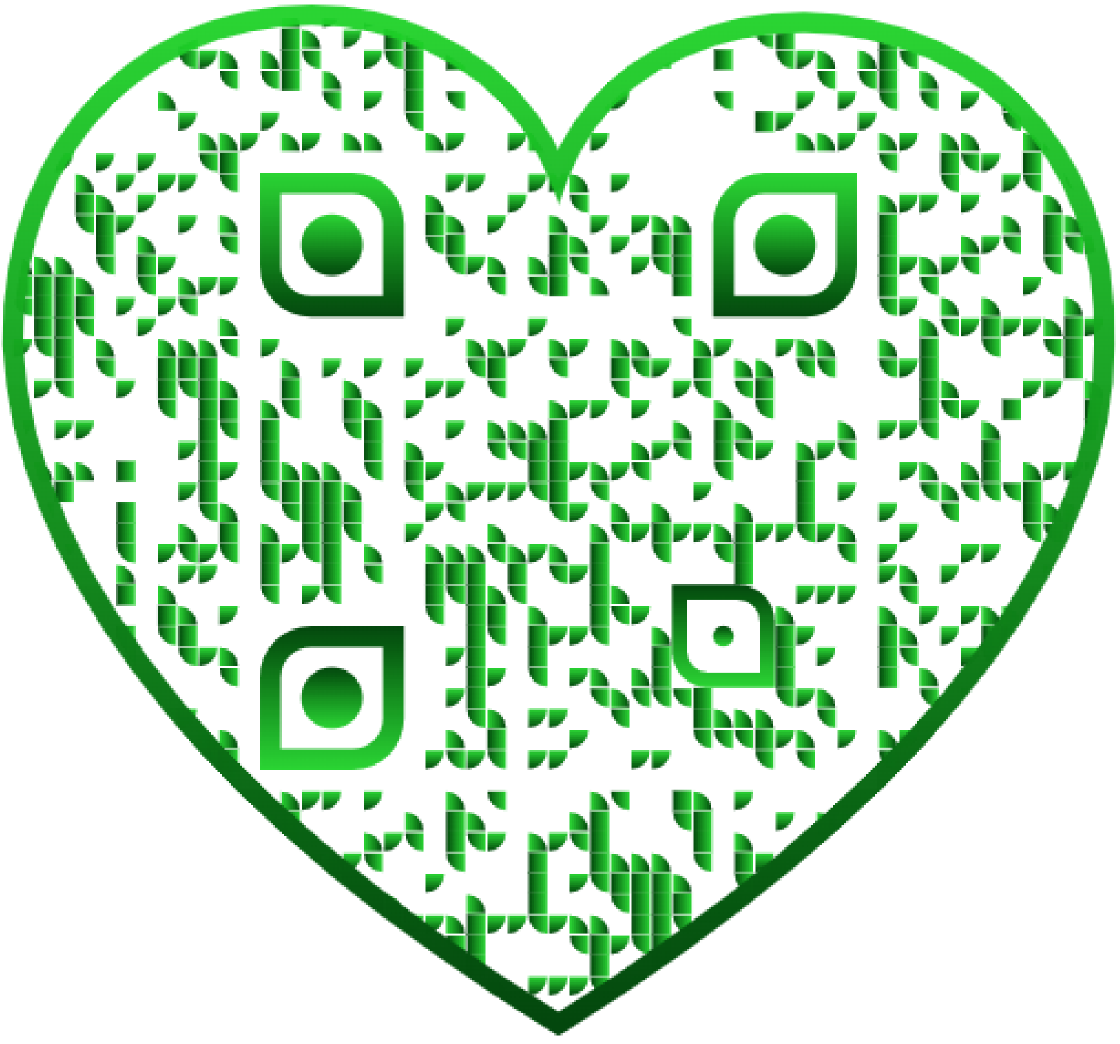
CHIC, **BERNARD EDWARDS** and the story of the most influential bassline in history

FUTURE

JOHN STIRRATT
The bassist behind Wilco

DUFF MCKAGAN
"'Sweet Child O' Mine' just came to me!"

RON CARTER
Encounters with Miles



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- 23038 - Cort GB24JJ Sunburst
- 15242 - Cort Jeff Berlin Rithimic 5 String Bass

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- 22370 - Fender 75th Anniv. Jazz Bass, Diamond
- 22368 - Fender 75th Anniv Precision Bass Diamond
- 18485 - Fender Am. Performer P. Bass Sunburst
- 22352 - Fender American Professional II Jazz, Blue
- 21789 - Fender Am Pro II Jazz Bass, Roasted Pine
- 21751 - Fender Am Pro II P. Bass, Dark Night
- 8927 - Fender Geddy Lee Jazz Bass in Sunburst
- 23497 - Fender MIJ P Bass, Secondhand, 1987-88
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- 22528 - Fender Player Jazz Bass, Tidepool
- 22014 - Fender Player Mustang Bass PJ Aged Nat
- 22818 - Fender Player Plus Jazz Bass Belair Blue
- 23360 - Fender Player Plus Jazz Bass Oly. Pearl
- 23322 - Fender Player P. Bass LH Sunburst
- 19473 - Fender Player Precision Bass, Sunburst
- 19314 - Fender Player Precision Bass, Black
- 23286 - Fender Player Precision Bass Black Lefty
- 21755 - Fender Player Precision Bass, Sunburst
- 19503 - Fender Vintera 60s Jazz Bass, Firemist
- 22836 - Fender Vintera 60s Jazz Bass Daphne Blue
- 22581 - Hagstrom Viking Bass, Tobacco Sunburst
- 11189 - Hofner HCT Shorty Bass, Black
- 19420 - Hofner HCT Violin Bass, Sunburst
- 23041 - Hofner Ignition Cavern ViolinBass Sburst
- 12188 - Hofner Ignition Violin Bass, Sunburst
- 13328 - Hofner Violin Bass Ignition Black
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- 23448 - Hohner The Jack Bass, Headed, Nat Used
- 23095 - Lakland Skyline Hollowbody Sunburst Used
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- 23607 - Levin Deluxe LB65 Bass in High-Glo Nat
- 22113 - Levin Deluxe LB76-SB Bass in High-Glo SB
- 22146 - Levin LB50-BK Bass in High-Glo Black
- 22147 - Levin LB50-SB Bass in High-Glo Sunburst
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- 23576 - Musicman Stingray Short Scale O. White
- 23569 - NS Design WAV4 Double Bass Amber
- 18114 - NS Design WAV4 Double Bass Trans Black
- 23584 - Orange O-Bass 2022 Version Black
- 23582 - Orange O-Bass 2022 Version
- 13012 - Rickenbacker 4003, Walnut
- 18077 - Rickenbacker 4003S Bass Guitar Mapleglo
- 18078 - Rickenbacker 4003S Bass, JetGlo
- 22624 - Sandberg California II VS 4-String Bass
- 23625 - Sandberg Electra TT4 RW Bass Guitar Blck
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- 22627 - Sandberg Electra VS4 RW Bass Guitar
- 23452 - Spector NS Pulse II 4 Ultra Violet Matte

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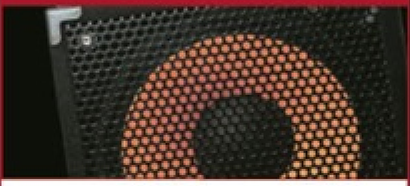
- 23598 - Squier 40th Anniv. Jazz Bass, Vintage Ed
- 23218 - Squier 40th Anniv Precision Bass Gold Ed
- 23368 - Squier 40th Anniv P Bass, Vint Ed SD Red
- 22897 - Squier Affinity PJ Bass Lake Placid Blue
- 16680 - Squier Affinity P Bass PJ Pack, Black
- 16151 - Squier Bronco Bass, Torino Red
- 18933 - Squier C. Vibe 60s Jazz Bass Fretless
- 23163 - Squier Classic Vibe 50s P Bass, W Blonde
- 23364 - Squier CV 60s P. Bass, 3-Colour Sunburst
- 21604 - Squier Classic Vibe 70s P. Bass, Walnut
- 22863 - Squier CV 50s Precision Bass Sunburst
- 23232 - Squier Cont Active Jazz Bass HH Sh. Gold
- 23340 - Squier Contemporary Jazz Bass, DMR
- 22885 - Squier FSR CV Late 50s P Bass, W. Blonde
- 23367 - Squier Mini Precision Bass, Black
- 23363 - Squier Mini Precision Bass, Dakota Red
- 23158 - Squier Paranormal Jazz Bass 54 Sunburst
- 22779 - Traveler Guitars Ultra-Light Bass
- 14778 - Vintage ICON V74MRJP Fretless, Sunburst
- 23445 - Yamaha BB434M Black
- 23458 - Yamaha BB734A Bass, Dark Coffee Sunburst
- 23589 - Yamaha TRBX304 Bass, Black
- 23508 - Yamaha TRBX304 Bass Factory Blue Finish

Bass Cabinets



- 13640 - Aguilar SL112 Bass Cabinet
- 16800 - BLUGuitar Nanocab
- 13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
- 16321 - Gallien Krueger CX115 Bass Cabinet

Mark bass

- 5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
- 6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
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- 9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
- 9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Cab
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- 16014 - Markbass CMD Super Combo K1 A.Caron
- 17732 - Markbass Marcus Miller Cab 102
- 5431 - Mark Bass NY121 New York 1x 12 Bass Cab
- 10412 - Markbass NY122 2 x 12 Bass Cab
- 10409 - Markbass NY151 1 x 15 Bass Cab
- 10410 - Markbass NY151 RJ 1 x 15" Randy Jackson
- 15272 - Markbass New York 122 Ninja Bona Cab

Orange

- 6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
- 6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
- 5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)
- 23026 - Phil Jones Bass C4 Compact Bass Cab
- 20753 - Stagg 10M Speakon-Jack Lead
- 20754 - Stagg 10M Spk-Spk Lead (SSP10SS15)

Trace Elliot

- 16856 - Trace Elliot 1x10 Elf Cab
- 19686 - Trace Elliot TE28E 2 × 8 bass cabinet

Electric & Silent Basses

- 14014 - Yamaha SLB300 Silent Double Bass
- 19938 - Yamaha SLB300 Silent Double Pro Bass

Acoustic Basses

- 15117 - Takamine GB30CE Electro-Acoustic Blk

Bass Combos

- 13577 - AER Amp III Bass Amp Combo
- 5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)
- 23344 - Ampeg BA115 Combo, Secondhand
- 21842 - Ashdown Studio 12
- 22943 - Ashdown Studio 15 Bass Amp Combo
- 22731 - Ashdown Ashdown Studio Jnr
- 23314 - Boss Katana 110 Bass Amp Combo
- 23313 - Boss Katana 210 Bass
- 13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package

Fender

- 13497 - Fender Rumble 100 Bass Amp Combo
- 4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
- 12745 - Fender Rumble 200 Bass Combo
- 15113 - Fender Rumble 25 Bass Amp Combo
- 13083 - Fender Rumble 40 Bass Amp Combo
- 18724 - Fender Rumble LT25 Bass Combo Amp

GK Gallien-Krueger

- 23058 - Gallien Krueger BL115 Backline, Used
- 16765 - Gallien Krueger MB110 Bass Combo

Mark bass

- 23515 - Mark Bass CMD102P IV Bass Combo
- 5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin (300W,)
- 5429 - Mark Bass Covers For Mark Bass Amps
- 6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P (300W, 1x12)
- 18371 - Markbass M. Miller CMD101Micro 60
- 18372 - Markbass Marcus Miller CMD 102 250
- 18370 - Markbass Marcus Miller CMD 102 500
- 9940 - Markbass Mini CMD 151 Jeff Berlin
- 9939 - Markbass MiniMark 802 Bass Combo
- 16764 - Markbass 102 250 Richard Bona Combo
- 19729 - Markbass Ninja 102-500 Bass Combo
- 9938 - MicroMark 801 Bass Combo

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- 15715 - Orange Crush Bass 100 Bass Combo
- 15716 - Orange Crush Bass 25 Bass Combo
- 15714 - Orange Crush Bass 50 Bass Combo
- 23007 - Orange Crush Bass 50 Glenn Hughes
- 22889 - Phil Jones BG400 Suitcase Combo
- 23544 - Phil Jones Bass Cub Pro BG120
- 22786 - Phil Jones Bass Double Four BG-75

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- 23086 - Fender Player Jazz Bass Fretless S.burst
- 22718 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass Ash
- 23566 - Magic Fluke Timber Electric Bass Cherry
- 18933 - Squier C. Vibe 60s Jazz Bass Fretless
- 14778 - Vintage ICON V74MRJP, Sunburst

Bass Heads

- 14618 - Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 Bass Amp Head
- 22741 - Ashdown ABM-300-EVO IV Head, Bass Amp
- 18850 - Bergantino Forte Bass Amplifier
- 21556 - Bergantino NXT210 Bass Cab
- 13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
- 16319 - Gallien Krueger MB500 Fusion Bass Amp H
- 14828 - Mark Bass Nano Mark 300 Bass Amp Head

Mark bass

- 6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head 500w
- 9035 - Markbass Little Mark III Tube Bass Head
- 23164 - MarkBass Little Mark IV Bass Amp Head
- 23326 - MarkBass Little Mark Vintage D2 Head
- 23541 - Mark Bass Nano Mark II Bass Amp Head
- 9256 - Markbass Big Bang 500W Bass Head
- 19484 - Markbass Evo 1 Bass Amp Head
- 17254 - Markbass Little Marcus 1000 Bass Amp
- 17252 - Markbass Little Marcus 250 Bass Amp Head
- 17009 - Markbass Little Marcus 500 Bass Amp Head
- 17010 - Markbass Little Marcus 800 Bass Amp Head
- 9941 - Markbass Little Mark 250 Head Black
- 15271 - Markbass Little Mark Ninja Bona Head
- 19282 - Markbass Little Mark Vintage Bass Amp Head
- 9944 - Markbass MultiAmp
- 15151 - Markbass Randy Jackson TTE501 Bass Head

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- 6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
- 8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head
- 19674 - Orange Little Bass Thing Bass Amp Head
- 5351 - Orange Terror Bass 500 TB500
- 20163 - D'addario Planet Waves 10FT Guitar Lead
- 16531 - Trace Elliot Elf 200 Watt Bass Amp Head
- 21033 - D'addario Planet Waves 20FT Lead Straight
- 21032 - D'addario Planet Waves 20FT Lead Angled
- 21040 - D'Addario Planet Waves 5ft Speaker Lead
- 16531 - Trace Elliot Elf 200 Watt Bass Amp Head

5 & 6 String Basses

- 22612 - Charvel Pro-Mod San Dimas Lambo Green
- 22538 - Cort A5 Beyond Open Pore Bubinga Natural
- 23281 - Cort Action Bass V Plus 5-String, Black
- 16526 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Black
- 15242 - Cort Jeff Berlin Rithimic 5 String Bass
- 23461 - Fender PlayerPlus Jazz Bass V 3-C Sburst
- 16766 - Ibanez SR30TH5PII Premium, 5-String Bass
- 23277 - MTD Kingston Z 5-String Trans Red Used
- 19381 - Marleaux MBass 5 String Bass, Burl Top
- 23068 - Overwater Custom 5 String Bass, Red
- 23335 - Overwater Perception Std Dlx, Nat, Used

Rickenbacker

- 21654 - Rickenbacker 4003S 5 Bass Guitar Jetglo
- 21655 - Rickenbacker 4003S5 String Bass Mapleglo
- 23564 - Rockbass Streamer LX5, Black
- 23090 - Sandberg California II VM 5 String, Marley Blue
- 19775 - Shine 5 String Bass, Trans Blue, Used

Spector

- 19735 - Spector Bass Rebop 5DLX Blck Cherry
- 22523 - Spector Bass Leg 5 Cl Blk Cherry Lefty
- 23166 - Spector Legend 5 Neck-Thru Bass, Walnut Stain
- 12406 - Spector Legend Custom 5 String, Amber
- 23278 - Squier Precision 5-String Sunburst, Used
- 19158 - Sterling by MusicMan SubRay 5 Bass, HBS
- 6448 - Westcoast JB5, Trans Amber
- 8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
- 4889 - Yamaha TRB1005J Bass, Natural

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

WELCOME

What's the world's most important bass-line? Ask the late Mr Edwards.

We admit it, all right? It's probably impossible to state with 100 percent accuracy what the most "recycled" bass part ever recorded is. Even a two-note I-V fill counts as a bass-line, after all, in which case there are thousands of possible contenders... but it's definitely reasonable to suggest that Chic's immortal 'Good Times', featuring the prematurely-departed Bernard Edwards' instantly-recognisable line, is a good contender for that title.

Reused, controversially at first, in the pioneering 'Rapper's Delight', that line was inescapable throughout the Eighties and beyond. We tell its story in this issue with the help of Edwards's career-long partner-in-crime Nile Rodgers, and Chic's current bass player Jerry Barnes, whose job it is to reproduce that finger-twisting line, night after night. That would make most of us... aaah... freak out!

The rest of BP 426 covers a wide range of bass territory, from psychedelia (Guy Pratt), via dub grooves (Al Cisneros), to alt-country (John Stirratt of Wilco) and beyond. We review the thunderous new Ernie Ball Darkray five-string, dig into Charvel's turbocharged San Dimas and plug into the new Mini amp and cab range from Trickfish.

If it's education you're looking for, you're in the right place, with three levels of lessons brought to you by our world-class team, as well as our Theory Of The Month and I Spy pages. Being a successful bass player means mastering a wide number of skill sets, and where better to come for those skills than here?

See you next month!
Joel McIver, Editor

Beeboza/Getty

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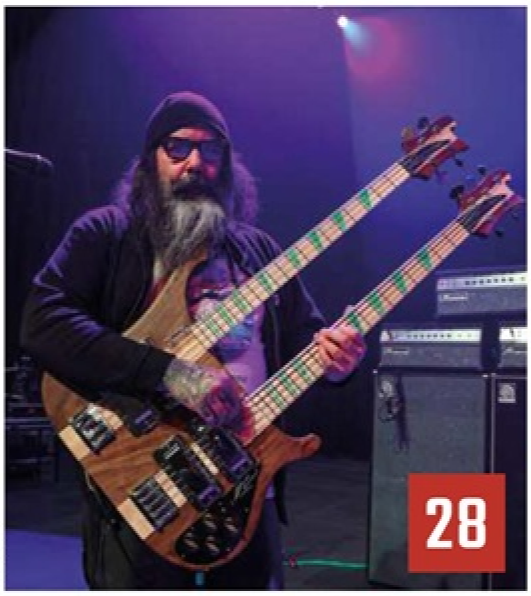
Mike Lawrie/Getty



Tim Bugbee

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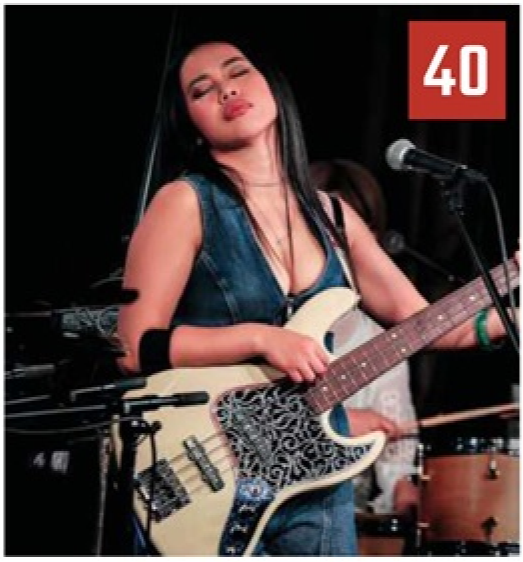

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THE Lowdown

News and views from the bass world, collated by BP's team of newshounds

BASS PLAYER MAGAZINE MOVES FULLY ONLINE

BP's print magazine is over, but we're not done. See you online.

It is with regret, a lot of sadness and a whole load of bring-it-on that the ***Bass Player*** team announces the end of our print magazine. You're reading the last US and UK issue: the next one will be a final, UK-only issue. Subscribers will be contacted and offered alternative options.

We've faced massive challenges over the last few years, through a difficult retail landscape and an *actual pandemic*, to maintain *Bass Player* as a profitable magazine, but 2022's dramatic increase in costs for us and our suppliers – paper, printing, fuel, and distribution to name a few – mean that our print edition is no longer viable. Every cloud has a silver lining, though – the time has come to focus 100 percent on our huge and growing online community.

Editor Joel McIver will join the online team, running the *Bass Player* channel at www.guitarworld.com, and serving *Bass Player*'s growing digital audience, which already numbers almost half a million followers on social media, with daily news, reviews and features.

As Joel says, "I'm gutted, that goes without saying, but we also think that the bass-playing community will be much better served by us putting all of our efforts into Bass Player's digital side, as one part of the Guitar World site.

"Until now, *Bass Player*'s online content has only consisted of content that has come from the print magazine. Now we can focus on delivering new and exclusive stories and videos that appeal to the global bass community on a daily basis.

"We thank everyone who's ever bought an issue of *Bass Player* over the last 32 years, all the great bassists who have given us their wisdom and their time, and all the talented writers, photographers, designers, educators and gear manufacturers who made the world of bass such a great place to be. We will strive to do you proud at *Bass Player*'s new online home."

Bass Player magazine was founded in 1988 as a spinoff of *Guitar Player* magazine. Two trial issues paved the way for issue 1 in 1990, featuring Billy Sheehan on its cover: 32 years and 426 issues later, he's scheduled to appear in the final issue, too.

If you need a reason why *Bass Player* won't be in print any more, here it is. While readers stayed loyal (thank you) and subscription figures are healthy (likewise), the market for print magazines is impossibly difficult. Our content has never been better: the market has never been more harsh.

The second phase of *Bass Player*'s career is about to begin. Stay with us – good times are ahead!
www.guitarworld.com/bass-player

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BASS
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TREBLE
TRACE ELLIOT

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Boogie Down

Mesa/Boogie unveils the Subway D-350.

Mesa/Boogie's new Subway D-350 is a compact but powerful unit that the Gibson-owned company says is the lightest, smallest and most affordable bass amp it's ever produced. Given that it weighs just over three pounds, and measures at just 3" high and 9" wide, we have no reason to quarrel with any of those claims. Small as it is, the amp packs quite a punch, with 350 watts of power. It's built with a solid-state preamp coupled with a lightweight Class D power amp and switch-mode power supply, a four-band EQ, separate Gain and Master Volume controls, Active/Passive and Input Mute switches, and a Bright switch. Expect to pay $699.

© Daniel Boczarski/Redferns

Che Bello

Anthrax bassist releases solo tunes.

After releasing his memoir *Fathers, Brothers, And Sons* last year, co-written with this magazine's editor, Anthrax bassist Frank Bello has released a solo EP, *Then I'm Gone*. "I revisited some really dark times in my life when I was writing my book, and writing these songs was the result of reliving them," Bello explains. "Music has always been a great outlet for me as a coping mechanism. I felt it was a good time to put out these songs for people who connected with the book, and maybe some who haven't yet. Thanks for listening!"

PAUL RYDER

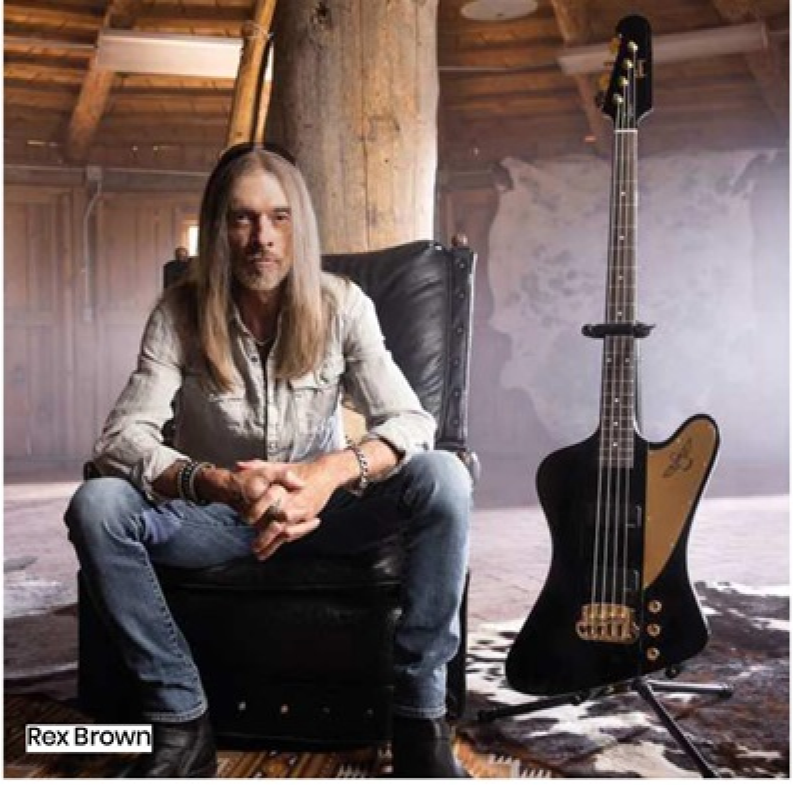
RIP to the Happy Mondays bassist.

Paul Ryder, the co-founder and longtime bassist of the British alt-rock band Happy Mondays, died at the age of 58 on July 15.

"The Ryder family and Happy Mondays band members are deeply saddened and shocked to say that Paul Ryder passed away this morning," the band wrote in a statement, adding "A true pioneer and legend, he will be forever missed. Long live his funk."

Born in Salford, England in 1964, Paul Ryder took up the bass at 13, and formed the Happy Mondays with his brother Shaun, the band's dynamic frontman, guitarist Mark Day, drummer Gary Whelan, keyboardist Paul Davis and dancer/percussionist Mark 'Bez' Berry in the early Eighties. Usually playing a Fender Jazz bass, Ryder supplied much of the band's club-friendly low end, which helped give them a crossover audience.

The Happy Mondays reached their commercial zenith in 1990 with their third album, *Pills 'N' Thrills And Bellyaches*. Propelled by the hit single 'Step On', the album then went platinum in the UK and helped spread what came to be known as the Madchester sound – that same blend of dance rhythms and psychedelic pop hooks – across the rest of the world.



Rex Brown

GEAR ROUNDUP

There's plenty of gear to get excited about. Check BP online for more!

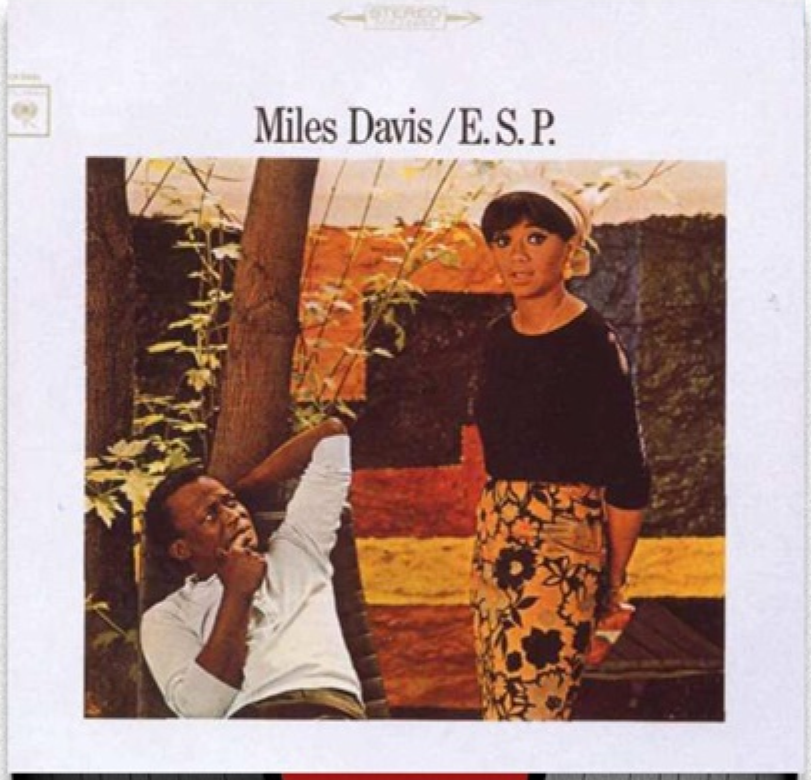
Pantera and Down legend Rex Brown has joined forces with **Gibson** to create a new signature Thunderbird bass guitar. The metal bass titan's first collaboration with Gibson, the Rex Brown Thunderbird was reportedly two and a half years in the making, and features a mahogany body and mahogany neck with a slimmer-than-usual profile and a 34", 12" radius rosewood fretboard with 20 medium jumbo frets. It'll cost you $2,799.

Baum's first artist signature bass, the Thunder, is on the way. Designed for Seye Adelekan, live bassist with Gorillaz, the pink instrument has a lightweight mahogany body, a one-piece maple neck and a dark rosewood fretboard with a signature lightning strike inlay across the 11th to 13th frets. Sporting 22 frets, a 34" scale length, a 12" fretboard radius and a single Goldsound pickup, the new instrument is designed to help Adelekan switch his right-hand technique from thumbing, fingerstyle or using a pick.

Seye Adelekan

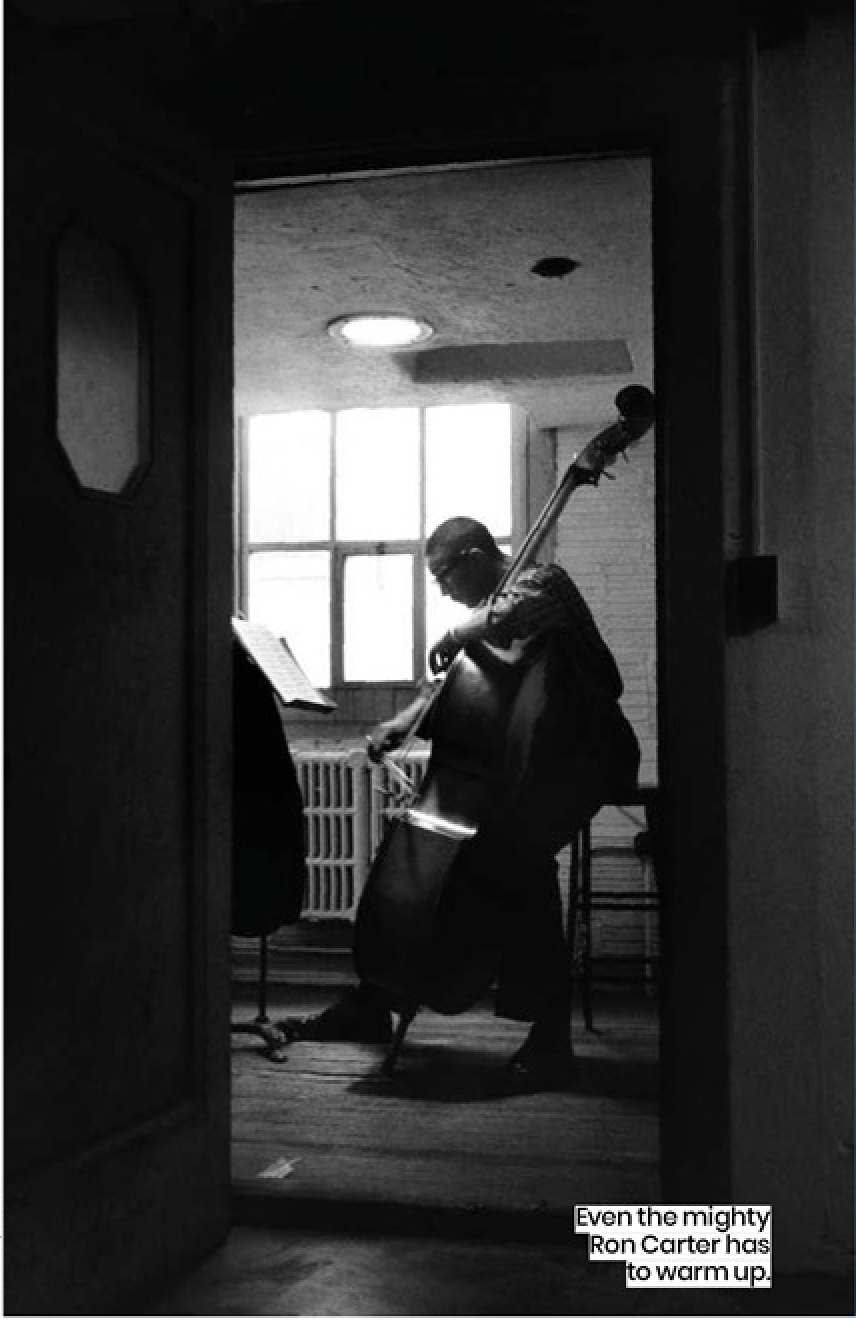
Markbass has lifted the lid on the MB58R range of 20 cabinets, eight combos and two heads that the Italian firm says will all offer "next-level power-to-weight ratio". The MB58R head and combos all share the same core amp circuit, the Little Mark 58R. The MB58R is a 500-watt solid-state build, which features a four-band EQ, a bi-band limiter, plus a handy option for preset EQs, including Flat, Scooped and FSW (footswitchable) settings. Available combos in the range will include 2x10", 1x12" (both standard and mini) and 1x15" speaker builds, with each available in Pure or P specs.

Finally, after 2000 sales across 30 territories, **With Bass In Mind** has republished *Chord Tone Concepts, Volume One: An Excavation Of The Humble Triad*. This second edition of the original manual has been expanded into a series that includes further publications from *BP* writer Philip Mann.



IN THE Groove

MILES DAVIS
E.S.P.
(COLUMBIA, 1965)



© Paul Haeffler/Redferns

Even the mighty Ron Carter has to warm up.

Let's dig out a bass-heavy LP from the vault. This month: the Ron Carter-featuring *E.S.P.* by Miles Davis

E*S.P.* is the debut LP from what is considered to be Miles Davis' second great quintet, and it is notable for its broad range of composition by all its members, aside from drummer Tony Williams. The album teeters on the precipice of the avant-garde, while retaining Davis' signature hard bop style. With its improvisational nature and tonal exploration, it is a statement of intent regarding the direction in which Davis et al would soar on forthcoming releases. That direction was to send Miles, and jazz, into previously uncharted territories of sound and rhythm.

The line-up was completed by tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter and pianist Herbie Hancock, making the quintet one of the most skilful and flexible in their field. It was also one of the most anchored, with the extraordinary Ronald Carter on bass.

In school, Carter's first instrument had been the cello until he quickly realised that many groups had no bassist, so he sold the cello and took lessons on his new bass. He's been quoted as saying that the bass player is the quarterback of a band; in the Davis quintet he is certainly throwing out the passes for the flair players to run with. And run with it, they certainly do.

Bandleader Davis takes a long solo on the rambunctious title track, with Carter smashing out incredibly speedy sixteenths. Things take a turn towards a more bluesy sound on the co-write with Carter, 'Eighty-One', the trumpeter constructing a signature solo. Carter is restrained, in contrast, with the story being told through his attack and tone as he walks solidly up and down the song. The bassist and drummer provide a solid, almost riff-like basis for the intensity and energy of the piece, which settles into a late-night mellow blues jam.

The youth of his new band – Williams was just 19 – was just what the trumpet hero needed as he faced his late thirties. There's an edge to the sound that is both cool and spiky, not least because Davis provides a more trebly and piercing timbre than ever before. More than anything, this was a band, a unit, a collective, with the chops and solidity to play themselves into ever more complex compositions.

Carter said the bass player is the quarterback of a band; in the Davis quintet he is certainly throwing out passes

Carter's 'R.J.' is an exemplar in working in and around the spaces: he's off on another kick, along with the splashing hi-hat work of Willliams. Hancock jumps in and out with clustered interventions, leaving room for Davis to expand. The relentless 'Agitation' has Carter working the whole fretboard, adding some very high-register urgency. The bassist's second collaboration with Davis closes out the set, 'Mood' leaning into a much more laid-back groove – by the standards of the rest of the album, at least. Carter is increasingly prominent on the track, to the extent that his is the last note you hear.

The great bassist went on to become one of the most-recorded players in jazz, with approximately 2,200 credits to his name. He continues to work in his ninth decade on the planet: long may Ron reign.

© Daniel Knighton/Getty

THIS MONTH

Josh Smith

The rock bassist du jour discusses his band Halestorm's five albums to date...

Josh Smith is the bassist and keyboardist in the shape-shifting rock band Halestorm, whose five albums to date have been acclaimed for their growing, ever-developing sound. The group's willingness to push their own musicianship, as well as their genre, marks them out as one of the most inventive heavy acts of today, as evidenced by 2013's Best Hard Rock/Metal Performance Grammy award for 'Love Bites (So Do I)'.

The band's new album, *Back From The Dead*, blends their juggernaut live energy with their customary studio explorations, as the engaging Smith tells us. He's not just a fine bassist: his background includes accomplished jazz studies, which have imbued him with a superior technique. His first instrument, Josh explains, was the piano. "When I'm home I usually go up to my piano and play Beethoven: at the moment it's his *Sonata Pathétique*," he says. "In the second movement, even the right hand is down in the bass clef. If you want to hear a cool bass-line I highly recommend it. That said, to get back into the bass guitar and nerd out is just fun."

We couldn't agree more, so let's crack on as we discuss how songs develop constantly on the road, the advantages of using a pick, the value of jamming in the writing process – and how you sometimes have to bite the bullet and jump right in.

Back From The Dead (2022)

"Don't overthink it – just play the song!"

"This was the most head-on, straightforward approach I've ever taken on an album and it really sets it apart. Joe Hottinger [guitar], Lzzy [sic] Hale [guitar/vocals] and I are locking in and playing very similar riffs, with obviously some movement and voicing differences. Usually I try to explore the songs, to shape and expand on the melody, but we're locking in with the drums, diving into it head first. Don't overthink it: just play the fucking song.

"Over the years we've matured as musicians, and we're fortunate to play these big open arenas. It's less about quantity, and more about what value you're giving a note rhythmically, and how long you're holding it down. It's our second album with Nick Raskulinecz producing, so with that comes evolution. His studio has a really dialled-in setup, so there's an old Ampeg SVT cabinet with an Orange head – it's beefy with that heavy tube sound. He loves his Geddy Lee Sansamp too. So the cab is being miked, of course, but there's also a DI going on, so it's a blend of several channels. Nick has an early 1970s P-Bass which is really heavy, like a brick. He's never done anything to it, and never modded it, but that thing just rips across the board. Every note on the neck is as present as the last, and it's just unbeatable."

Halestorm

(2009)

"I was trying to get my hits in where I could"

"We were just over in the UK, and we were looking at the set-list, as we like to change it up live, keep it interesting for the crowd. We do a little jam, I switch to keyboards, and it's a lot of fun, so we pulled out 'Dirty Work' from the debut album. It was one of those 'end of the album, let's put this on there' situations. It's a really fun bass-line – a very thumpy walking line, which goes right back to my roots of being a jazz bassist. The song is quirky.

"On 'I'm Not An Angel' I do this one-five thing up the neck on the 14th fret. I always think of the way Flea uses his voicings – they're just so beautiful – so I tried to employ a little bit of that. There's a fun little riff at the end where Lzzy is singing the title. It's the climax of the song and I did a little pentatonic. I was trying to get my hits in where I could, as a bassist.

"It was our first big release, so I knew I had to make some moments, make more of it. I feel like that is where your signature is as a player. You're the glue between the melody and rhythm for an entire song, so you have to pick and choose these moments and say, 'That's me, right there'."

The Strange Case Of…

(2012)

"We were ready to make album two"

"You spend your whole life making that first record, and with the amount we were touring we got a feel for what we needed to do. You go on the road and every night is a lesson. We'd done a covers EP [2011's *Reanimate*], and learning someone else's song and approach is a lesson in itself too. On there we'd done Skid Row's 'Slave To The Grind', and when we wrote 'Love Bites' you can see the connection there.

"We were ready for album number two. It was fun to make. We've been trying ever since this album came out to find a better closing song live than 'I Miss The Misery', and we're damned if we can! We do this big long jam every time and the crowd reaction is always amazing. I have a really melodic part in the bridge – it's tucked away, but if you listen you can hear it up top in that 12th fret area.

"Another breakthrough moment was when Lzzy brought 'Rock Show' to the table. I decided to just drive it, on the downbeat, with an accent at the top of the measure. I could tell everyone was looking at me like, 'What the hell is he doing?' But on the playback, they were like, 'That's really cool'. It's this syncopated moment before we all come back in, locking in again."

Into The Wild Life

(2015)

"We challenged ourselves in new ways"

"We decided to experiment and challenge ourselves in new ways with this one. It's such a departure from the first two albums. We threw the rock formula of the time out of the window. It's still one of my favourite albums.

"I'd always played with my fingers, but around this time I started using a pick a little more, trying to get some new sounds, using new techniques. I was waiting for people to call me out and say it sounded bad, but I treated it as a really great challenge, and these days I use a pick more than fingers.

"I had a little fun intro in 'I Am The Fire', then there's 'The Reckoning' which is almost abstract in a way that it doesn't seem to be following any part or any pattern. I'm just peeking in and out, and then hitting it with the vocals, then off I go again. I think of 'Airbag' from Radiohead's *OK Computer*, and little ninth-grade Josh saying 'Oh, I can do that'. I love making unique voicings and rhythms. I was a piano player first, and to me, our band is less-is-more. My tone has moved into the midrange over the years. Bass down, mid pushed and treble pushed even more. That's where my bass sits really well."

Vicious

(2018)

"It's all about taking new risks"

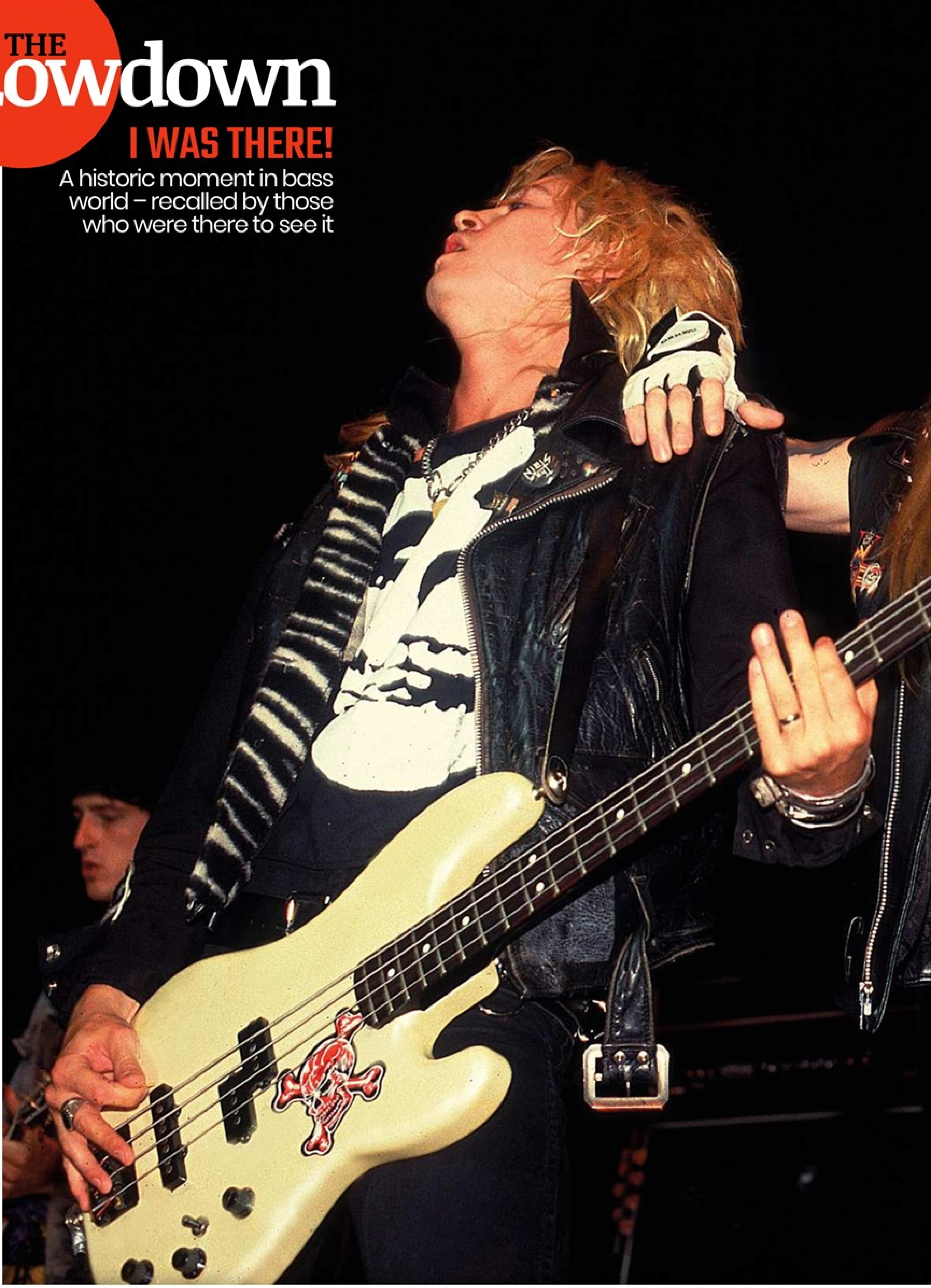
"Our producer, Nick Raskulinecz, got us to come to the studio, set up a jam and start recording, then if we heard something we liked in the playback we'd go back and work on it. So we were in the live room playing for weeks. Joe had a riff for a chorus, a really interesting, unique metal riff, and from there we built 'Uncomfortable' which is a kind of Frankenstein of a song. In the verses I do a much more rhythmic strum live than just straight 16th notes, and the song is quite a ride for how relatively short it is.

"We experimented with different backbeat rhythms too, like on 'Vicious' and 'White Dress'. Joe, Lzzy and Arejay [Hale, drums] and I are playing, and everyone has a part they are responsible for to make it rhythmically sound as a whole. We did that a bunch on this record. I don't know what I was listening to at the time, probably soul, as I was employing the ninth a lot more, like on 'Skulls' which moves around the root note by a whole step. It's a voicing I hadn't used as the focal point of a bass-line before, so again, it's about taking new risks, learning new approaches, and making them work for us."

THE Lowdown

I WAS THERE!

A historic moment in bass world – recalled by those who were there to see it



© Paul Natkin/Getty

Duff and Axl in 1988: practically (sweet) children

When Duff McKagan of Guns N'Roses wrote a certain bass solo...

Michael 'Duff' McKagan, the punk rocker from Seattle who moved to Hollywood in the mid-Eighties, joined Guns N'Roses and became a star, is best known in bass world for a slinky four-bar solo executed in the upper register over the intro to their best-known song, 'Sweet Child O' Mine'. How did he come up with the solo, we ask?

"It just happened," he told us a while back, adding: "Really, it's all a product of what you listen to and what influenced you, and then what you hear and what you think is right for the part – and it's either gonna happen for you or it's not. I've never tried to force any sort of bass-line, it's either gonna come to me or it's not."

He added, "The first Fender I bought was in 1986: I got it at Guitar Center when GN'R got our record advance. I had some money to get some gear, and that was the bass I chose to get, and it really was that bass that was the core of my sound – the *Appetite For Destruction* sound. I played that bass on every record that I've played bass on. I've used that exact same setup."

Always the coolest member of GNR

Duff's scooped tone had a crisp top end that stood out among the layers of screaming guitars, as readers of a certain age will remember. "Nobody advised me about my tone – I really didn't know who to ask back then," he explained. "I knew what I didn't want to sound like, I didn't want to have a big fuzz-tone bass where you couldn't hear the notes. Izzy [Stradlin, guitar] had this real thin, sparse sound and Slash had a big, Marshall-plus-Les Paul sound, and somewhere in there was a spot for me. We all had to have our spot to make that band work, and I kinda knew where I wanted to go – and I really landed on it with that bass and the Rotosound strings and a Gallien-Krueger rig. It's real simple what I use."

He doesn't hear his lines like the rest of us, he reveals: "I'll hear those bass-lines, like the beginning of 'Sweet Child O' Mine' or the beginning of 'Fall To Pieces' [by his later band Velvet Revolver], as a cello line for some reason. I don't know why that is, I don't play cello or anything. It would be a neat thing to learn it, but I'm busy right now learning how to play bass!"

Low Life

COMPRESSION: YES OR NO

Do you need a compressor when you play live shows?

Maximise your live bass performance with Tax The Heat bassist and BIMM tutor Antonio Angotti.

BIMM INSTITUTE

The question of whether to use a compressor live is one that I hear often. Compression is an absolute staple for mixing and mastering engineers in a studio context, or for front-of-house engineers when they need to get an overall polished sound for a band – but is it as essential when we play live?

To remind ourselves what compression actually is, Universal Audio gives the following industry definition: "Compressors and limiters are used to reduce dynamic range: the span between the softest and loudest sounds".

In essence, a compressor makes our louder notes quieter and our quieter notes louder, resulting in closer volume consistency.

The argument often made against the use of compression in a live setting is that it has the potential to strip our ability to be dynamic with our playing. If we want to drop the dynamic of a quiet section or provide huge contrast through a build into a climactic chorus, compression will reduce that effect in favour of a more even output. It's also argued that compressor use essentially compensates for a lack of control in a bassist's technique. I've always loved the concept that your plucking hand is essentially your 'compressor', as the mindset behind this focuses on really developing your dynamic control through metering your attack, touch and note lengths, in turn opening the doors to both consistent and expressive playing.

However, don't let this paint a negative image of using compressors live. There is a time, a place and a personal preference – irrespective of my recommendations – for the use of one. I'd say one of the most common uses of a compressor is when using the slap bass technique, due to the varying transients between slapping, popping and muting. Again, you could work on your technique here to gain more consistency in velocity, but a compressor will help to draw out the percussive details with better clarity. The same applies for tapping.

Compressors are also great at increasing sustain with the right settings dialled in: this is perfect for ballads or songs where you are holding on longer notes.

In addition, don't forget that a compressor doesn't have to be an 'always-on' part of your signal path. Use it creatively and for occasions where it is really relevant. Otherwise, work on your technique to achieve an accurate level of consistency so that you have the flexibility to play evenly, as well as having full access to the widest dynamic range.

The Woodshed

YOU DESERVE THE BEST...

...but what really makes one bass better than another?

Ace luthier Rob Elrick brings decades of wisdom to the table. Listen up as he delivers the verdict!

I don't know you, but I know a lot of people like you, and I think it's a safe bet that you deserve better. You may aspire to own the best bass that money can buy, but too often that 'dream bass' is financially out of reach. Or is it?

Having the best instrument rarely makes anyone a better player overnight. Owning an instrument from an aspirational brand may provide motivation to spend more time with a bass in our hands, and inspire more diligent practice regimens to justify its investment. But the most valuable investment we make as musicians is not in the gear we own, it's the time we invest in ourselves to develop and improve.

Let's take a moment to think about what makes the best bass. Ideally, it's the best instrument you can comfortably afford, that plays comfortably and performs well. Depending on one's resources, what may be considered affordable can range from a modestly-priced import to a custom-spec'ed creation. Fortunately, in today's market good-quality instruments are available across a wide price range – so what amounts to the 'best bass' may have little to nothing to do with price.

The search for anyone's 'best bass' should never be limited to aspirational brands. The focus should always be on attainable instruments that meet the performance demands and playability requirements of an individual player. While most players trade up numerous times throughout their careers, many also recount stories of 'the one that got away'. Too often, those were basses passed over for an instrument from a more affluent brand which may not have lived up to expectations.

Before you go brand shopping, focus on utility over vanity

So before you go brand shopping, focus on utility over vanity. Look for basses that are comfortably attainable within your budget, and take a second look at the bass that's been by your side and in your hands for years. Is it possible to attain optimal performance from your existing instrument? Maybe it would benefit from a little fret work, better pickups, or an improved circuit? Perhaps all it really needs is more frequent setups and string changes?

Experiment along the way to find the best strings to complement your instrument and your individual playing style. Consider the best qualities of the bass you already have to ensure it doesn't become 'the one that got away' – and never save the best for last.

Theory of the Month

STUDY LINE TRANSPOSITION

Joe Hubbard takes us through three ways to exploit this useful theory

Welcome! Learning to play bass-lines and solos over different chords has its challenges. One of the most effective ways to learn this skill is by taking a line or a given chord and then transposing that line, note for note, over another chord. The benefits are immediate, because you'll be learning how to play a melodic idea over one chord – and by simply altering a few notes, or even a single note, you will see how the line adapts to the new chord.

This is extremely powerful, because instead of learning hundreds of licks, you can take a finite number of ideas and replicate the same lines over all the given chord qualities. Not only is this beneficial while developing your musical vocabulary, it's also extremely useful for your technical development and ear training. Until next time...

EXERCISE ONE

Notice how I'm taking a simple motif in bar 1, which is ♭3-chromatic below-5-♭3, followed by a descending scale line using the C Dorian mode. In bar 2, the same phrase is being played with the same formula, but this time starting from the 11. In bar 3 the same formula is being played staring from the 5th, and in bar 4 the phrase starts on the 13. A common mistake when playing this line is hearing it as a B♭ major scale idea, with B♭ being the root. Over the C-7 chord, the C is the root.

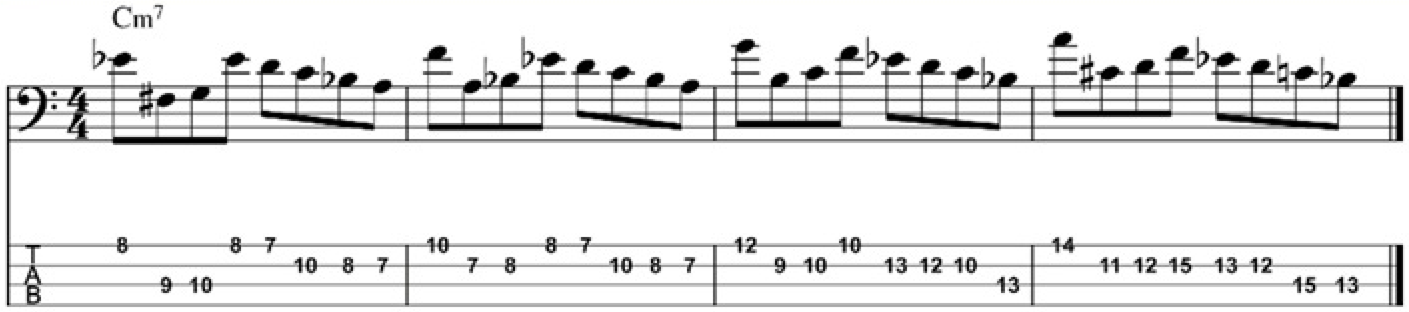
EXERCISE TWO

Here, we're taking the exact same line as in Exercise 1 and transposing it over a C7 chord. Over the C7 we're using a C Lydian ♭7 scale, which means that there are two different notes to Exercise 1: these are E and F#.

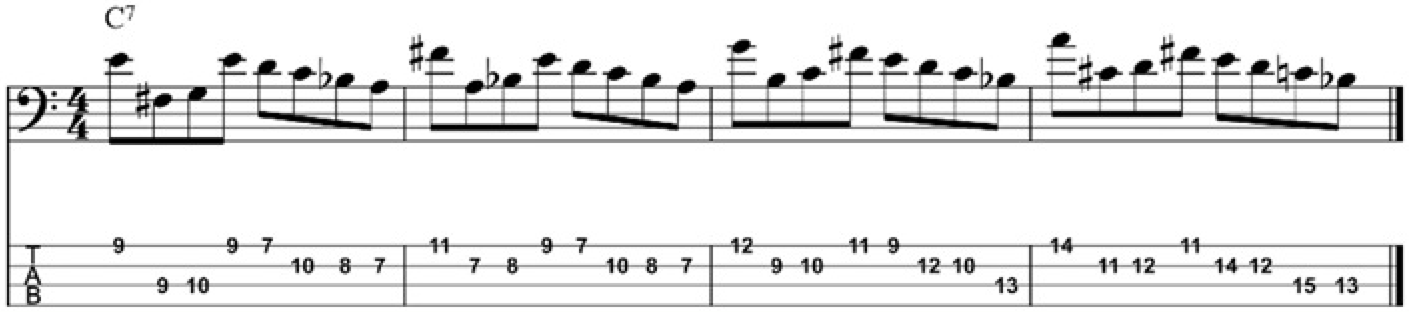
EXERCISE THREE

Exercise 3 follows the same line transposition rules as in the previous exercises. Over the Cmaj7 the scale is C Lydian, so now we have three different notes to Exercise 1: E, F# and B. Work out the fingerings slowly as dictated in the tablature, and once you have the fingerings down, practise slowly with a metronome.

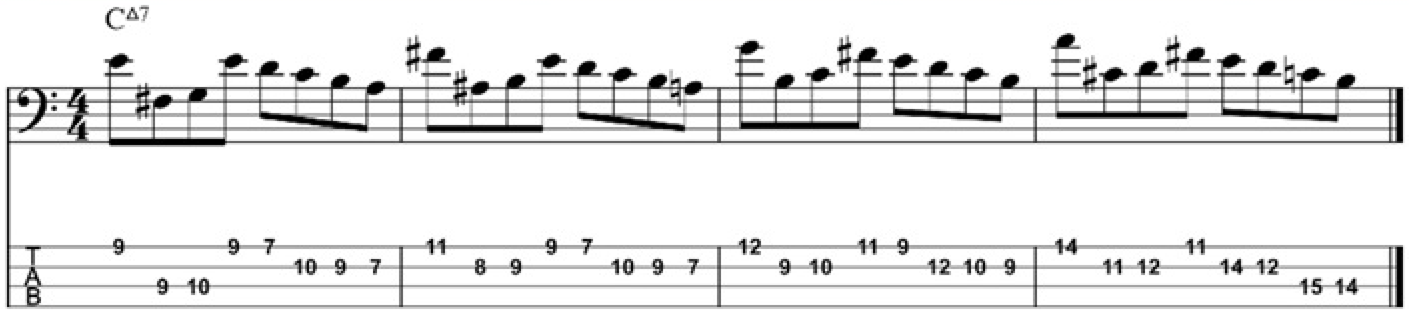
EXERCISE ONE



EXERCISE TWO



EXERCISE THREE



The coolest band ever formed (from left): Bernard Edwards, Norma Jean Wright, Nile Rodgers and Tony Thompson in 1977.

THE MOST IMPORTANT BASS-LINE IN HISTORY?

Chic's immortal 'Good Times' wasn't just a stroke of disco genius and a dancefloor anthem for the ages: the late **Bernard Edwards**' finger-twisting bass part was sampled for 'Rapper's Delight' and many, many other songs. We tell its story, with a little help from Chic's **Nile Rodgers** and **Jerry Barnes** as well as 'Rapper's Delight' bassist **Chip Shearin**.

Words: Joel McIver, Kevin Johnson **Photography:** Getty

When an issue of *Bass Player* goes off to print, and we celebrate with a glass of something stimulating and a spirited debate about life at the low end, we often find ourselves arguing about where the best bass parts are to be found. Sometimes this turns into a poll, as in BP 425 when we got you to vote for the coolest 100 bass parts ever recorded, but usually it just ends in some sort of intoxicated shouting match.

One thing we do agree on, though, is that the slickest, funkiest bass-lines ever committed to vinyl come from the world of disco. No disrespect to our friends in the jazz, funk, soul or metal worlds: we just think that bass parts recorded under the glitter of the disco ball have something special.

The data actually bears us out on this. Go to whosampled.com and pull up Chic's immortal 1979 single 'Good Times': you'll learn that it's been copied, borrowed or otherwise repurposed for over 200 other songs. That number refers to all elements of the song, not just the bass part laid down by the effortlessly fast-fingered Bernard Edwards – but his bass-line is such a huge part of the composition that we can assume it appears in a large number of those songs.

GAB Archive/Redferns/Getty

> **As the legend goes, Nile Rodgers moved from club to club, in New York, ingesting a pile of cocaine, ecstasy, champagne and vodka**

Have you ever tried to play that 20-note bass part? It's worth the attempt, perhaps at a low tempo for the first couple of passes. Once you've got it down, you'll be flying: playing bass like it was always meant to be played. Most of us won't even attempt to pluck the notes as Edwards did, though: a guitarist before he switched to bass, he used a signature 'chucking' style where he strummed the strings with his index fingernail. This led to bloodshed, as Nile Rodgers recalls in this feature, and is probably best avoided unless you're an Edwards obsessive.

The line itself, plus the ebullient vocals and stabbing strings, gives 'Good Times' a sense of hedonistic joy that made sense on the dancefloor, but perhaps less so in the grey world outside the nightclub. Chic, who had formed in 1976 and were on their third album, *Risqué*, by the time 'Good Times' was written, were experiencing a 'Disco Sucks' backlash. Punk rock was on the rise, and the group had recently lost their singer Luther Vandross, who was making a bid for solo stardom.

As the legend goes, 'Good Times' came from a New York night on the town to end all nights on the town. Rodgers spent an evening moving from club to club, accompanied by Queen bassist John Deacon, ingesting a pile of cocaine, ecstasy, champagne and vodka that he referred to as

Grandmaster Flash (seated, centre) and the Furious Five in 1980.

Anthony Barboza / Getty

Barefaced Chic

Nile Rodgers of Chic is the greatest disco songwriter of them all – and also Bernard Edwards' best friend. We asked the great man to remember his fallen comrade, while we tried not to… aaaaah… freak out.

Bernard and Nile in NYC, July 1981.

Allan Tannenbaum / Getty

How did you first meet Bernard, Nile?

We became friends the first night we met in person. However, the first time we spoke on the phone, he told me to lose his number! He told me never to call him again and hung up the phone. I was a hippie and I had told him I wanted to put together a band which combined Fairport Convention, the Mahavishnu Orchestra and Country Joe & The Fish. But when we met at a gig, we didn't know who the other one was, and I just plugged in and started playing with the band. He and I organised the musicians between us and told them what to do, and at the end of the night he said 'Man, I really dig what you did. I really love how you were leading the band' and I said, 'Yeah, I feel the same about you – you're a natural bandleader'. He asked me my name and then said, 'Are you that dude I talked to about putting together a band? Oh wow. I didn't know you were that funky!' Ever since that moment, we were never really apart. Even when Chic broke up, I called him to record with Madonna and David Bowie: we were always friends."

Tell us about Bernard's work with David Bowie.

"I had a bet with David that Bernard would knock out the song he played on from the *Let's Dance* album in 15 minutes, and Bernard did it in one take. Afterwards he looked at me and Bowie with a little bit of an attitude, and said, 'Is that what you motherfuckers were looking for?' Ha ha! I said to Bowie, 'You got any problems with that part, David?' and he said 'Sounds great to me!' I looked at my watch – and Bernard had done the take in 14 minutes exactly."

We write a lot about funk bass in this magazine, but what is funk guitar playing, as you see it?

"I try to accentuate the important part of any groove. Typically I play sixteenth notes with my right hand. To me, my style of funk is based on playing groups of three strings at a time and not playing too much information on the first stroke. That way, on the second stroke that follows it, I can invert and make it sound almost like a Clavinet or another keyboard instrument… It just hit me this morning that what I am is the right hand of a piano player – a frustrated piano player, actually, because I only have six strings. That's what I do! When you're watching a band's guitar player play a song, look at his right hand. Once they've learned the song, they play it the same way from then on, but a piano player would do something different, maybe in a different octave. I'll always try and do something interesting."

What did you and Bernard have in common?

"We had serious respect for each other's ability to make music. One thing that was absolutely certain in my mind was that there was never, ever a job that I couldn't call Bernard up to play bass on, and that whichever artist he played with would be completely blown away. And that's how he felt about me. He would tell people, 'You want some unique guitar parts that are going to make the music groove? Call my boy Nile!' We were proud of each other. I'd say to people, 'You want to see some serious bass playing? Watch this.'"

Did you and Bernard ever swap instruments?

"We would swap instruments sometimes, to teach each other songs. I would say 'I hear the bass-line going like this' and he would do the same for the guitar part. He wrote songs on the guitar, too, because he was a guitar player first. That's why he used that weird chucking style where he acted like he was holding a pick but he was using his forefinger."

Did he use tape to protect his finger?

"Nah! The blood would just drip down. At the end of the Chic era at the end of the 70s, we had hit records by Chic and Sister Sledge, so our concerts became very long, and some of them would have a lot of chucking, like 'Everybody Dance' and 'Happy Man'. Many a night, we'd finish the show and there'd be a little pool of blood on his shoes or dripping down his bass."

How will you remember Bernard, Nile?

"The last night Bernard played with me, who was he on stage with? Steve Winwood, Simon Le Bon, Sister Sledge, and me, his best friend. He told an interviewer at the time, 'I never have more fun than when I'm playing with Nile. I like playing with other people, don't get me wrong, but no-one is as much fun as Nile. I'm his bass player and he's my guitar player'. That made me cry, but it was exactly how it was."

Info: www.nilerodgers.com

Deep in the flow, Stingray in hand.

'Good Times' sold over five million copies across its run and became Atlantic Records' biggest ever single at the time

a 'Breakfast Of Champions'. Presumably a stimulating espresso wasn't required.

Arriving at a Manhattan studio, the Power Station – not coincidentally, later the name of a Duran Duran spinoff in which he was involved – Rodgers met Thompson and Edwards to work on *Risqué*. As he later recalled, Edwards responded to the command of "Walk!" with the 'Good Times' bass part, replying "Is that what you mean?"

The backing track was duly cut in a single take, Rodgers' earlier 'breakfast' presumably assisting with the work rate, and the vocals were laid down by Fonzi Thornton, Alf Anderson and Michelle Cobbs.

Issued as a single in the summer of '79, 'Good Times' was instantly popular, battling for the Number 1 spot for weeks with the Knack's 'My Sharona' in a rock-versus-disco face-off that attracted widespread attention.

When 'Good Times' did hit the top spot on August 18, it stayed there for a single week before the rockers won that battle, but it sold over five million copies across its run and became Atlantic Records' biggest ever single at the time. It was Chic's commercial peak, in retrospect, signalling a decline that ended with the band's split in 1983. A 1992 reformation was promising, but the death of Edwards in '96 and then Thompson in 2003 called time on the band until Rodgers relaunched its current, incredibly popular incarnation, featuring the amazing Jerry Barnes on bass.

Still, 'Good Times' has never really gone away. John Deacon's similar line on Queen's 1980 single 'Another One Bites The Dust' was clearly inspired by the earlier work, and there's the small matter of the 200-plus samples we mentioned earlier. In fact, you only need to zero in on only the most famous of those 'Good Times'-influenced songs, the amazing

Ebet Roberts/Redferns via Getty

Good Time... keeping

If you want to know how to play those fiendish Bernard Edwards lines, who better to ask for advice than his successor in Chic, the great Jerry Barnes?.

1 Play with confidence: know you can do the gig

"I went to see Bernard and Nile play in New York City right before they went on the Japan tour in 1996, where Bernard passed away. I had never seen Chic live, and I was sitting there staring at Bernard while he played, although I couldn't figure out what his hands were doing. Towards the end of the following year, a friend of mine told me that Nile was looking for a bass player and that I'd be perfect for the job. Katreese [Jerry's late sister] and I auditioned for two minutes before Nile said 'Okay, are you guys available?' It was really funny, because we immediately started playing like we were the band. In hindsight it was one of the more serendipitous moments of my life: I didn't think of it as an audition, I just thought of it as 'I know I can do this gig'."

2 Don't worry about technique

"At first, I played a lot of things differently than Bernard in terms of hand positioning, and right- and left-hand techniques. I had my own way of interpreting his parts, until about 12 years into playing with Nile, I went on YouTube and found ***American Bandstand*** footage of Chic. I was watching how Bernard played 'Everybody Dance', and he had his left hand in first position. I always played the C on the E string on the eighth fret, so I'd made it harder for myself! After seeing Bernard do it, I started playing it in his hand position."

3 Serve the song

"If your ego gets in the way of the music, you're not doing the right thing – you're not honouring the gig or the music or the artist. If you're doing your own music, do what you want, but if you're playing other people's music, particularly pop music with parts that people have been used to hearing, you've got to stay in the ballpark. I've only gotten carried away a few times, when I just went crazy, but I normally don't do that."

4 If you use the 'chucking' technique, prepare for it to hurt. A lot

"I use it all the time, but not like him, because I'm trying to keep from bleeding. It does hurt, and I'd say you have to do it all the time, to build up some callouses. You will literally break your fingernail if you do it like Bernard. I do it at one particular spot in every show, but not like him; I do it more like a mute with the right hand."

5 Build stamina

"Can you play in the pocket for three hours? Can you play the same bass-line for 10 minutes? There's an art to that, but that's the stuff that makes people dance and move – when you play the pocket with the band. That's the magic."

Instagram: @jerrybarnesbass

Nile and Jerry, keeping the Chic brand fresh

FilmMagic / Getty

'Rapper's Delight' by the Sugarhill Gang, to see how Edwards' bass part made history.

Produced by the Sugar Hill label owner Sylvia Robinson, a pioneer in the music industry, 'Rapper's Delight' is widely thought to have been responsible for bringing hip-hop – then a fairly obscure, live-only phenomenon – to the public. Listen to the lines 'Hip-hop, hippie to the hippie, to the hip-hip-hop and you don't stop' and 'To the bang-bang boogie, say up jump the boogie to the rhythm of the boogie, the beat' as early examples of both elaborate rapping and usage of the hip-hop term itself.

'Rapper's Delight' is preserved in the Library of Congress for being 'culturally, historically or aesthetically significant'

Chic, a five-piece comprising the key duo of Edwards on bass and Nile Rodgers on guitar, plus drummer Tony Thompson and a changing cast of singers, had already encountered hip-hop in its original live form. At a show in September 1979, they were playing a set at New York's Palladium, on a bill shared with Blondie and the Clash, when rapper Fab Five Freddy and three members of the Sugarhill Gang climbed on stage and began freestyling. Only weeks later, Rodgers heard 'Rapper's Delight' while dancing at the New York club Leviticus. The DJ informed him that he had bought the record, an early version of the release, that same day.

Note that 'Rapper's Delight' didn't actually sample the original 'Good Times' bass-line. Instead, Sylvia Robinson asked the then 17-year-old bassist Chip Shearin to replicate the line, with a minor difference intended to defeat copyright laws. See Shearin's interview in this feature for how this turned out, but suffice it to say that Rodgers and Edwards weren't fooled for a moment. Helped along by the threat of a lawsuit, Sugar Hill soon added the Chic duo's names as co-composers to the Sugarhill Gang song.

'Rapper's Delight' performed only moderately well on its release, but broke boundaries as the first Top 40 single released only as a 12" extended version in the USA. It was later voted number two on VH1's 100 Greatest Hip-Hop Songs and added to NPR's list of the 100 most important American musical works of the 20th century. It is now preserved in the National Recording Registry by the Library of Congress for being 'culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant' and has been inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

All this reveals how impactful 'Good Times' was, and it was the bass part that made the lion's share of that contribution. Remember that, the next time your guitar player makes a 'bass player' joke.

Yes, that *is* a BC Rich Eagle that he's playing...

James Andanson/Sygma via Getty

Juli Leonard/Raleigh News & Observer/Tribune News Service via Getty

Hot Chip

'Rapper's Delight' bassist Chip Shearin tells Kevin Johnson about the session that changed the world

'Rapper's Delight' started a huge movement. Could you tell us how that went down?
"I would just sit around [at the Sugar Hill studio, and] I would play on some things that were used. Some of those things didn't really make a splash, but this particular day they said, 'We need you to play this particular song. If you could, I need you to play it for 15 minutes'. [Sylvia Robinson] said, 'Have you ever heard 'Good Times' by Chic?' I said yeah, because I had always been a fan of Bernard Edwards. If you're a bass player, then you know hip bass-lines."

Did you know the bass-line note for note?
"I knew of the bass-line, but not all of it. Then Sylvia said, 'Can you change it a little bit?' I'm like, 'I'm not sure exactly what you want me to do'. Because you have to remember, this had never been done before. The whole idea of recording someone else's music live had never really been done. You played it live at a club, but you didn't record it. Her reason for doing that years ago was that she was hoping and thinking that she could avoid some legal ramifications if the bass-line was a tiny bit off. There was no real study of intellectual property. We really hadn't had a lawsuit of any magnitude whatsoever over it, and the parody law hadn't been pushed... what I did was play it on the downbeat. It was on the downbeat rather than on the upbeat or the last sixteenth. That was supposed to be the difference, as if when Nile Rodgers heard it he would say, 'Nope, never heard it before!'"

Presumably that didn't work.
"I talked to Nile about that before. I said, 'Did it trick you?' and he just laughed so hard. I told him that's what Sylvia had me do, and he said it was the craziest thing. But at that particular point, I still had no idea that the reason for the change was some kind of way of controlling the intellectual property in their favour. Never crossed my mind at 17 years old."

Was it stressful to record?
"I remember playing this thing with the drummer and we were sweating bullets, because 15 minutes is a long-ass time. It really is. There was a clock that used to sit in the studio over the control window. The metronome back then was a blinking light. There was no click, so you had to watch the light. It got to a point where the drummer and I were watching the light. We only did one take, but for some reason we both understood that we both couldn't watch the light because we'd have two interpretations of the light. I turned my head away and watched him instead. So we ended up finishing and I remember rolling up my cable and threw my bass in my hardshell case. I asked Mrs. Robinson, 'What are you going to do with this?' She said, 'I have these kids that me and my son found that are just going to talk real fast over the music'. I looked at her and said, 'Good luck with that'. She paid us 70 dollars for the day and gave me a ride home in her Rolls Royce. That was a real treat for a little coloured kid from North Carolina. I was thinking that I made out better than she did!"

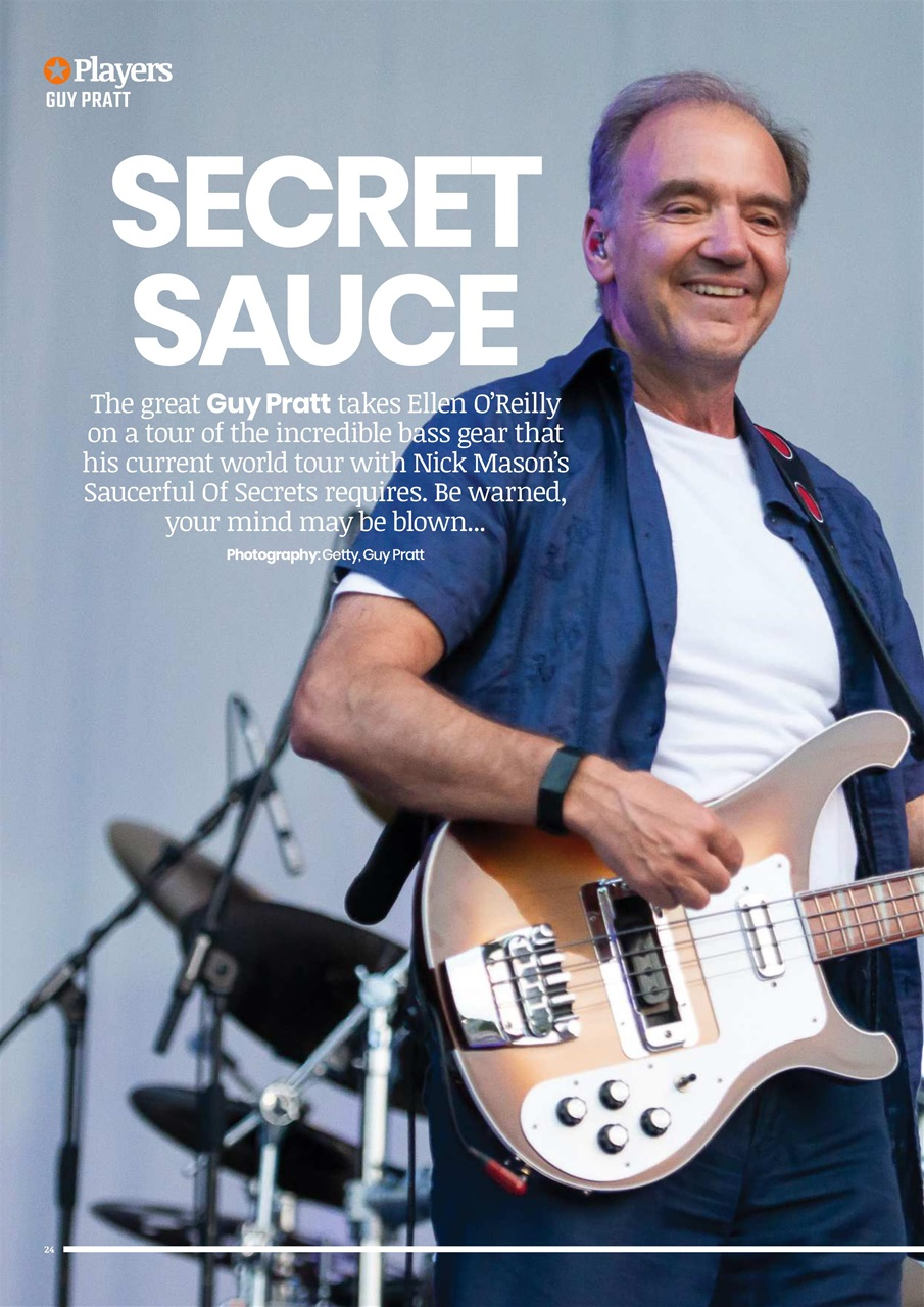
It's such a pivotal song. Has it been a bit of a burden at the same time?
"Just imagine that everywhere you go, you're going to hear that song. There isn't a wedding band that doesn't play it. So if you're going to visit your aunt in Nebraska or wherever and you step into a wedding, there it is. Radio Shack and JC Penney used it in commercials. I had a list one time of all the commercial uses of the tune and it was probably close to 74 uses in commercials, motion pictures, television shows. You could never get away from it. Of course it picked up again about 10 years ago when rap became even more of a constant. It became really accepted in middle-class America as a way of pushing a device or product. Now it's a tie-back to something that some people view as classic, like it's an oldie... It became a burden a lot. I hid from it for years. I think *Rolling Stone* made a point of putting it in a list of top 100 greatest songs of all time... Then I got a letter from John Deacon from Queen that tells me that he heard my version before he heard Bernard Edwards' version for the sake of giving him a reason for writing 'Another One Bites The Dust'. I refuse to accept that burden!"

Instagram: @chipshearin

SECRET SAUCE

The great **Guy Pratt** takes Ellen O'Reilly on a tour of the incredible bass gear that his current world tour with Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets requires. Be warned, your mind may be blown...

Photography: Getty, Guy Pratt



Who could have predicted that one of the most acclaimed rock bands of recent years would be devoted to playing the early, vividly psychedelic music of Pink Floyd? Led by that legendary band's drummer Nick Mason, who is joined by Spandau Ballet's Gary Kemp (guitar, vocals), Guy Pratt (bass, vocals), Lee Harris (guitar) and Dom Beken (keyboards), Saucerful Of Secrets have been met with rapturous approval since their pre-pandemic formation back in 2018.

The fact that this unique group has been met with such a keen universal response may be down to the musicianship of its members; it might be because the music, taken from Floyd's unnerving but brilliant Syd Barrett era, is so powerful; or perhaps it's because real music, delivered by real musicians, always finds its niche.

Pratt in particular does a lot of work in this ensemble, trading vocals with Kemp while navigating a sea of bass effects and anchoring the group through arrangements and time signatures that would defeat most of us. Little wonder that the band has international dates lined up throughout this year and beyond: they will be on tour in North America in September and October.

"I'm very excited about this amp: Ashdown and I have been talking about doing this for years"

Pratt guides me to his impressive signature Ashdown Engineering bass rig, made up of his signature Interstellar 600 head and two CL-310 DH cabs. "I'm very, very excited about this amp," he says. "Ashdown and I have been talking about doing something like this for years. It all started back in 2006, on a David Gilmour tour, when I had WEM logos put on my Ashdown cabs. We always had this joke about old WEM cabinets, because in the early days, it was all WEM gear and PA equipment."

Readers of a certain age will remember that gear by WEM, or Watkins Electric Music, epitomised a certain Sixties and Seventies bass sound. As Pratt points out, "Roger [Waters, original Pink Floyd bassist] used to use a WEM PA speaker and a WEM bass amp, so the idea that Ashdown and I had was to build something that was a bit like that. It's basically an ABM head, but the EQ is slightly different and it's got a much pokier valve in it, because I never really used to use drive at all, but on this stuff I do. It also has a Taurus input on the back, which I'm actually using!"

I ask him if the Taurus pedal input was built specifically for Saucerful Of Secrets. "Yes, it's for this tour – but it's part of the ethos. The joke is, what's the most prog thing you could have? The cabs are based on the old WEM PA cabinets: each of them has three

10" speakers, with a tweeter on top." That's right – three speakers. "They're concise and punchy, and they work really well, especially now that I'm on in-ears. You always want something that you can really hear."

We move on to his arsenal of basses, and in true prog fashion there are a couple of Rickenbackers in the mix – a 2003 Montezuma and a 2018 Jetglo. Pratt also brings out a 2007 Bill Nash bass, which Nash built especially for him.

As he tells us, "On everything Floyd from '67 to 1970, I play a Rickenbacker bass, and on everything from 1970 onwards, I play a Precision. The year 1970 was when they had their gear stolen in New Orleans, so that's when Roger got his famous black Precision. Mine is an American Professional P-Bass: it's the first new Fender instrument that I've played for years, and it's really great."

"The year 1970 was when Pink Floyd had their gear stolen, so that's when Roger got his black Precision"

He then shows me his pedalboard, although – as you can see from the photos, shot especially for *BP* while Saucerful Of Secrets were on tour in Europe earlier this year – it's more like a pedal patio, laden with all kinds of weird and wonderful stompboxes. While he's tap-dancing on these, the show also requires him to sing lead, employ incredible playing technique in different time signatures – and still stay true to the Barrett-era spirit of the band. No mean feat, we think you'll agree, and when Pratt demonstrates a complex bass-line that doubles up on Taurus pedals, chorus and octave effects at the same time, it sounds beyond epic.

"My previous tech, Mike Clement, had this pedalboard built," he explains, "but I now have to have this exact amount of pedals – because I have to have a full board!"

Pratt does literally mean a full board; to his right he has Studiologic Taurus pedals, a TC Electronic Alter Ego Vintage Echo, and a Moog Minotaur Bass Synth. Directly in front of him he's got a Chicago Parachute Wah and a Dunlop DVP1 Volume pedal.

Check those signature Ashdown amps and cabs: truly stellar!

Bass: how high can you go?

What about the infamous early-Floyd delay sounds? He has those covered with a Foxgear Echosex, a Boss DD-500, a TC Electronic Hall Of Fame reverb, a Boss Dimension C DC-2W Chorus and his signature Foxgear Knee Trembler tremolo.

As for drive, that's sorted too, with the Ashdown footswitch to kick in the valve when needed, and a Boss OD-200 to give it more bite. Pratt demonstrates the various effects configurations for us, depending on which classic song from the early Floyd repertoire he's playing, including some impressive cinematic soundscapes.

With all this mayhem going on, pretty much any bassist would need a hell of a lot of compression, as the touring bass players reading this will agree. Pratt has not one but three compression pedals in tow: these are an Origin Effects Cali 76, his signature Ashdown Macchiato, and a Demeter Compulator at the end of the chain.

All of this is topped off with two octave pedals, a Boss Super Octave OC-3 and a TC Electronic Sub'n'Up. Why, we ask? "Well, it just wouldn't be me without one!" he chuckles.

At this point I'm buzzing – and I can't wait to go and see Saucerful Of Secrets play live. Make sure that you see them if you can: it'll be a bass masterclass that you won't forget in a hurry.

Saucerful Of Secrets are touring the USA in 2022.
Info: www.guypratt.com, www.thesaucerfulofsecrets.com

DUB STORM

OM and Sleep bassist **Al Cisneros** gathers his solo singles into a collection, *Sinai Dub Box*, discusses the role of flow states and the universal groove, and reveals which bass is so heavy he needs pain relief to play it...

Interview: Joel McIver **Photography:** Tim Bugbee, Getty

Sinai Dub Box (2012-2022) is the perfect collectible artefact, a box set of seven 7" vinyl singles that is limited to 1000 copies and is therefore both scarce and expensive to buy, although fortunately digital alternatives exist. Fans of Al Cisneros, bassist and vocalist with the cult stoner/doom metal band Sleep and founder of the experimental duo OM, will line up to purchase the box set. Somehow, its weight and exclusivity, coupled with the sidewalk-shaking low end of the immense music it contains, aligns perfectly with the ethos of Cisneros' mission.

"There's a few new songs on this box set, and the rest are ones that I put out myself over the past decade. I decided to remaster all of those and put them into one place, because it's time to move forward with the next chapter," says Cisneros.

With a decade of monstrous bass tones contained in these seven slices of vinyl, does he feel that his sound has changed over the years? "To an extent," he agrees. "The early songs were recorded on a Rickenbacker 4004, and I love those bass tones. It's just direct: it's not even through an amp, it's just direct into the board with a little bit of compression. And then the most recent song is 'High Concentrate', which I recorded with a Ricky 4003S5, again straight into the board, although I'll also use Ampeg and Orange if I need an amp. I think that bass sounds a little bit better than the 4004, but it's not a large difference. As I'm sure you can tell, I EQ the hell out of it, to get some overwhelming sub frequency."

The box set also represents 10 years of Cisneros learning to engineer his music, he tells us. What are the challenges there? "Well, there's been times I've got a test pressing back from the vinyl factory, and the stylus doesn't even want to stay in the groove, because there's so much low end. It's resonating the vents in the building and everything! That doesn't sound good, so it's been a learning process for me about bass frequencies and their relationship to the drums, so that they can both speak without eclipsing one another. There's a couple of records in the box which I would definitely remix if I was recording them today. You have to turn the bass down on the hi-fi to hear it properly, because it just sounds like a truck outside."

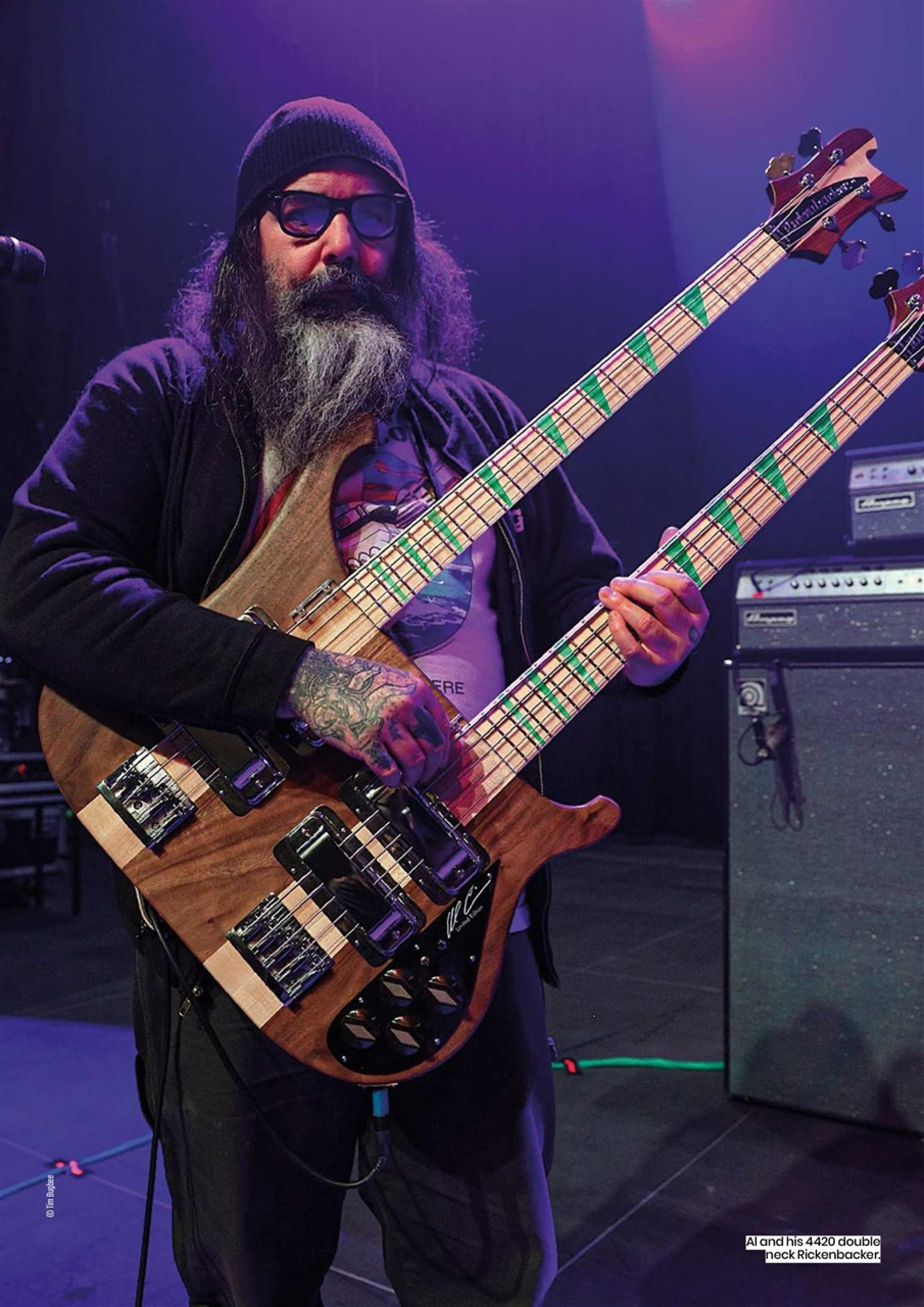
A lifelong Rickenbacker player, Cisneros has been seen with a variety of Rickys worldwide since he first came to prominence in 1992 with Sleep's much-acclaimed second album, *Sleep's Holy Mountain*. "For my lifespan, I'll be playing Rickenbackers," he says, prompting us to ask what it is that he loves about these ever-popular, always-divisive basses.

"I also like the sound of a Fender Jazz," he tells us, "but for me, when I hear the sound of the Rickenbackers on Rush's *Permanent Waves*, and Geddy Lee's tone on 'Free Will' and 'Jacob's Ladder', there's nothing else like that. I see bass makers trying to improve and re-improve what they do, but for me, I think that at a certain point, it's more important to pause and ask, 'Are we really making this bass better than it was before?'"

> **"It's important to pause and ask, 'Are we really making this bass better than it was before?'"**

Does he acquire new Rickenbackers as time passes, or has he got his collection down? "I've got it down now," he says. "They recently built me a 4420, which is a four-string 4003AC on top and the five-string version on the bottom. It's incredible. It means I don't have to switch basses on stage between songs. Depending on the way that we compose the set, that can be really cool."

We recently interviewed Les Claypool of Primus, a fellow Geddy Lee fan, who bewailed the weight of his Rickenbacker 4080, which has a bass at the top and a guitar on the bottom. "My 4420 is really


© Tim Bugbee

Al and his 4420 double neck Rickenbacker.

heavy," agrees Cisneros. "I played it on tour a couple of months back, and I assumed I could get through a whole set with it, but now I understand why Geddy only used it on the song 'Xanadu'! You pretty much have to get physical therapy to play that instrument."

When Rickenbacker first introduced five-strings to their classic 4000 bass series a few years ago, the new instruments divided Ricky fans, partly because the pickups looked out of place but also because the idea of a low B string on such a resolutely vintage design felt a touch blasphemous. Which way does Cisneros go on this crucial matter?

"I love their five-strings," he says, "and since about 2010, I've been using them more and more. You can only tune down a four-string so far, and I don't believe that those drop-tuning devices really do anything. I think they're just a way to sell more strings. Also, if you want to keep the tonality of the instrument, as well as the action that you're used to playing on the fifth string, you need a proper five-string bass."

He adds: "I only use a five for a few songs here and there: on the new OM album, which we're about to start mixing, it's on a couple of longer pieces. I have one from the Nineties that they made on the first run, and the 4003S5 that they introduced with the wider fretboard. I think I prefer the more recent model. Anyway, they both sound good. You know, Rickenbacker really put spirit into their builds. You can go there and see it. It's not a soulless, mechanised assembly line. It's individual people putting care into it. It's really something else."

This brings us to the thematic content of the music on the box set. Whether with Sleep, OM or solo, Cisneros' songs and lyrics have always reflected an interest in otherworldly dimensions and how to get there, assisted by a keen interest in psychedelic experimentation: see Sleep's classic *Dopesmoker* album from 2003 for more on this. I'm interested to know how playing bass, especially with the numbingly heavy dub style that Cisneros plays so effortlessly, fits in with all this.

"Well, it's a cliché, but you get out of the way," he says. "You just let be, and if there's a bass and a drum groove happening, that's what the universe is doing with you. Just be, just let it go. It's hard to explain."

Do we bass players have a shortcut to that mindset because of what we do? "Definitely. My mind goes back to the writings of [medieval Japanese philosopher] Miyamoto Musashi, and his *Book Of Five Rings*, and these types of things. That's the OG flow state, right? Let your heart go into the amplifier. If it's not coming from there, it's generally going to be more noise than music. Take your music seriously, but keep a sense of humour, too."

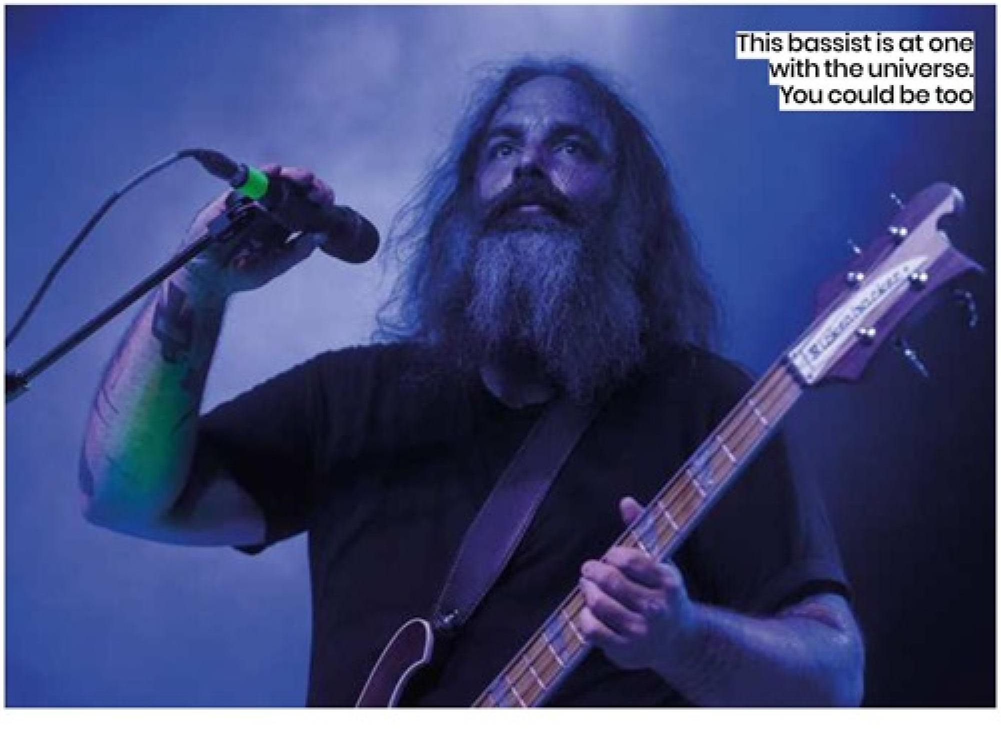
> **"Bass grooves are all out there in the universe. When we're quiet, on our best day, we sense them"**

Cisneros' method is to clear his mind and allow his bass parts to come to him, he says. "I'm not religious in a conventional sense, but I have a daily practice based on meditation and internal quiet. That's the starting point for my daily life for me. I do some yoga, too. Not hatha yoga, but yoga proper from the teachings of [ancient Indian sage] Patanjali, which is basically mindfulness. Technically, it's mind*less*ness – you want less mind and more heart. All of those things are the Rush albums of my daily life. You know what I mean?"

He continues: "Bass grooves are all out there in the universe. When we're quiet, on our best days, we sense them. I don't think we build or create them – I think they're there already. They were there way before us, and they'll be there way after. We have this calibration in our body with our heart and our breathing. Those are both timing mechanisms, and I think they hone in on the universe. If you're quiet enough, and this ties into the daily practice I mentioned, sometimes – due to something beyond you – you will be lucky enough to hear a groove. It appears, and you recognise it, and you're like, 'Holy shit. There it is!' You hear it, and feel it. You can document it and recreate it on your instrument, and hopefully it will make people feel happy when they hear it. I think that's the secret."

We'll take that. Plug in your bass, switch off your mind – and listen.

***Sinai Dub Box (2012–2022)* is out now.**
Info: www.dragcity.com/products/sinai-dub-box


This bassist is at one with the universe. You could be too

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PASSING NOTES

Dylan Flynn nearly died in a car crash more than two decades ago. His injuries were so bad that he had to give up playing bass – so now he lends his bass out to professional bass players to raise money for charity. Lee Marlow tells his unique story.

It's a late-Nineties American Fender Precision Deluxe, in one of those colours that only fragrant interior designers or Fender custom paint sprayers truly know or even attempt to describe. "Just say it's bluey-green," says its owner, Dylan Flynn.

Flynn, 37, of Columbus, Ohio, bought the bass new 20 years ago for $1,200. "I started with a Squier, then a Mexican P-Bass – and then this. It's such a beautiful instrument. I care about two things in this house: my bass and my dog. It's the most expensive thing I own."

And yet, for most of the time Flynn has owned the bass, it has remained in his closet gathering dust, untouched and unplayed. There's a tragic, real-life reason for this.

Flynn learned to play bass when he was 15. He was a natural and quickly became proficient, playing with a guitarist friend. However, on the last day of that year's school term, it all came to an end when Flynn was involved in a serious car crash. He was lucky to survive, having been in a coma for 12 days. Doctors told his mother he might not live and that if he did, he'd be severely mentally and physically disabled.

Miraculously, Flynn walked out of the hospital six weeks later – but more or less everything he used to take for granted had crumbled. His recovery was slow. "I remember nothing of the crash, and very little afterwards," he says. "Just endless therapy and physio. It was hard work." He had to teach himself to walk and talk – and to play the bass.

> **"I'd like bigger bands and bigger bass players to play my Precision. Wouldn't it be great if Paul McCartney could play it?"**

"The crash affected the entire left side of my body. My left arm and hand just couldn't do it," he tells *BP*. "I was going to the gym, I was lifting weights, building back my strength – but anything requiring fine motor skills, even just brushing my teeth, I couldn't do it. So playing the bass, without the strength I needed in my left arm and the dexterity in my fingers, it was over. I was devastated."

The American Deluxe was silently packed away and never played again. Flynn couldn't sell it. He couldn't bear to part with it – but neither could he play it.

Paying it forward

What a waste, he used to think. A thousand-dollar American P-Bass, labelled by his bass teacher as "the Mercedes of basses", just sitting in his cupboard, loved but untouched. So seven years ago, Flynn hatched a plan: if he couldn't play it, he'd try to persuade some of his favourite bass players to play it. 'Pass the Bass' was born.

It's not easy to get well-known bass players to play your instrument, especially when the world has been locked down for the best part of two years and there are hardly any gigs, but Flynn has persevered. Since he started the campaign, he and his Fender Deluxe P have travelled more than 20,000 miles across the US, by air and in Flynn's trusty Honda Civic. The bass has been played by an impressive roll-call of bassists.

Chris Barker, aka Chris Number Two, of Pennsylvania punksters Anti-Flag, was the first to play it. "I went to a lot of their gigs," says Flynn. "I struck up a conversation with their merch guy, and he was interested in the story so he arranged for me to meet Chris at the next gig. Chris took it on stage at the Showboat venue in Washington, Seattle and played it."

Flynn was watching from the balcony. "Aw, man, it was amazing. I was smiling from ear to ear. It was the happiest, proudest moment – a real emotional experience," he says.

Other punk bassists followed – Mark Hoppus of Blink 182 ("although he only played it in the soundcheck – but, man, that was a thrill"), Matt Freeman of Rancid and Fat Mike from NOFX.

"These were my punk rock heroes," says Flynn, "so it has genuinely meant something to me."

His old school pal, Brian, persuaded him to raise money while doing this in order to help other people, like Flynn, with lasting brain injuries. In five years, they have raised more than $30,000 for two US brain charities.

It's good, says Flynn – but it could be better. It could be bigger. They could raise more money, and he aims to spread the word beyond the US punk community.

"I'd like bigger bands and bigger bass players to get involved," he says. "The Eagles, well-known metal bands, Elton John – wouldn't it be great if Paul McCartney, the world's most iconic bass player, could play it?"

More than 50 bass players have played Flynn's Deluxe Fender Precision – but what if it was 150? 500? 1000 or more?

"We've done a lot and raised a lot just by word of mouth – but I know we could do more," he says.

Do you want to play Dylan Flynn's Fender American Deluxe bass and raise money for a good cause? Visit https://passthebass.org and drop him a message.

COPING STRATEGIES

Kelly-Dawn Hellmrich of Aussie rockers Camp Cope had a tough start on bass, but persevered. Read and learn!

I grew up with a musical parent and a house full of instruments, so it feels like I've played guitar forever: I probably picked up a guitar every day of my life once I was physically able to. My dad bought me a bass for my 13th birthday because he was so determined that I was born to be a bass player. I was really repulsed by the idea at first, but I came around. I picked it up to learn some Blink-182 riffs one day – and then never really put it down.

My first bass guitar was an OLP MM4 Stingray, but it was so heavy and way too big for me. I got that bass because a kid in a local band I really liked had one, but it was just so wrong for me. It hurt my hands and my shoulders – and for a while I thought I was just too small to play bass. It was frustrating because I got pretty good at bass, but just couldn't play for long periods of time.

The singer of my first band ended up giving me her brother's short-scale Mustang bass that was lying around their garage. It turned out to be a Japanese vintage from the Nineties. The curve of the body of that bass fit so much better for my body and my chest, and its short scale meant I could reach notes I couldn't before. That's when I really started to develop my style of playing high up on the neck – it just felt so comfortable to sit there.

I think what has been cool is that a lot of our female, trans and non-binary fans have reached out and said that the Mustang bass has been perfect for them to learn on, too: they wouldn't have really known that if I didn't preach its playability in that way.

"I think that if I was a man I'd be more respected in my bass playing individuality, rather than scrutinised"

I'm painfully loyal to the Mustang. As I said, I've just never found a bass that fits my body in the same way. I usually play through an Ampeg SVT. I don't use any effects: I like a clean sound and plugging straight into the amp.

Peter Hook was a major influence. He's super unique, and when you hum a Joy Division song you hum the bass-line. That's the inspiration for how I write for Camp Cope.

"We write very emotional music."

I'm heavily influenced by the post-punk sound, and I like listening to Nineties R&B and early-2000s synth parts to inspire me when I write. We write very emotional music, so our lead singer Georgia is also a big inspiration for my bass parts: I try to tell the same story through the bass-lines that she does lyrically.

People tend to have a lot of opinions on the way I play. I've been told I play bass more "feminine", "like a guitar", "all over the place" and the worst of them all is when people say "I play wrong". I don't think that there is such a thing as playing an instrument "wrong" and it's the most hurtful when people imply I don't know what I'm doing. I also think that if I was a man I'd be a bit more respected in my individuality the way Peter Hook was, rather than constantly scrutinised.

My band have been my number one fans when it comes to my bass-lines, and are always supportive with me trying out new things. They also push me when it comes to the writing and recording process: they're like, 'Okay, you need to make the song more interesting, that's your job. You can do better'.

It can be frustrating, but they're always right, and it always leads to me coming up with an interesting part. During the recording of our last album I said 'On the next album, you gotta give me some different chords because I'm running out of ideas." And you know what, on this new album they did that – and I think it's some of my best work.

*Camp Cope's new album **Running With The Hurricane** is out now.*
Info: campcope.bandcamp.com

COUNTRY WAYS

Wilco bassist **John Stirratt** looks back at decades of struggle – and a trajectory that has made his band a modern alt-country institution.

Interview: Ryan Madora **Photography:** Getty

John Stirratt is one of the best bass players you've never heard of. He has served as the steadfast foundation of Wilco, a band that has shaped our definition of rock, alt-country, and indie music for nearly three decades. Standing alongside Jeff Tweedy since Wilco's inception in 1994, he has received two Grammy awards and industry accolades, headlined festivals and toured the world, and recently recorded their twelfth studio album, *Cruel Country*. Stirratt has made a career as the bass player in a rock and roll band – something that many of us have aspired to do.

As with most bands, the first few years were riddled by landmines: ego trips, label feuds, rigorous touring schedules, and personnel changes. By 2004, Wilco finally settled into their current line-up, a six-piece ensemble that could instantly go from chaotic noise and grizzly guitars to an exposed acoustic sound accompanied by vulnerable vocals. With hard work, consistent output, and the willingness to defy industry standards, they've anticipated the needs of their audience and continued to reap the benefits of longevity. They've never had a hit song or topped the charts, yet they've proven time and time again that if they make a record, the fans will listen.

2021 marked the twentieth anniversary of Wilco's industry-disrupting and critically acclaimed record, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, which they've taken to re-releasing and performing in full. It's only fitting that they follow this milestone with *Cruel Country*, a new double LP that recently debuted at their Massachusetts festival, Solid Sound.

The creation of this record took advantage of The Loft, a Chicago-based Wilco clubhouse that serves as a creative playground, studio, and gear-filled wonderland. For the first time in years, the band recorded live and with all members on the studio floor. This old-school method meant that Stirratt had to carefully select gear that would work within this setting. While his go-to basses typically include a few vintage Precisions, a '65 Fender Jazz, and a '73 Les Paul Signature, this record called for something slightly different.

"With Wilco, things happen live, and the first take could really be the take"

"I wanted to hold everything down, given how much instrumentation was going on: acoustic guitar, two electrics or two pianos, and drums. I've had a Guild Starfire since recording the album *Being There* [1996] and I've always come back to it for this sort of mid-tempo, acoustic-style bass. It's got an incredible bottom end when played with fingers, and when I play it with a pick, it's got a wonderful, woody sustain.

"I was also using an Epiphone Embassy bass. It has the same pickups as a Thunderbird, but with a cutaway and a massive low end, and I also bought an Eighties Rickenbacker that was really useful on a couple of songs. I went with these basses because there were a lot of competing frequencies when using Precisions. With this material, and the band recording six at a time, Jeff was playing a lot of acoustic, so I was looking for the boomiest basses I could find.

© Mike Lawrie/Getty

Plus, I played a B-15 throughout the whole thing, so that was fun."

Regarding inspiration, Stirratt referenced classic country recordings and the concept of tic-tac bass, a style of playing that involves doubling or mimicking the sound of an acoustic bass. "I think one of my favourite bass sounds is Bee Spears' tone on *Honky Tonk Heroes* [1973] by Waylon Jennings. It's a super clicky, picky bass, almost like they're trying to approximate a tic-tac bass. As we were working on a few songs, I was playing with a pick and sponge, and it was a big enough ensemble that it needed something broad and really full-range. I grabbed the Guild and the sonic scope of it just sounded right. I also listened to George Jones and Tammy Wynette records, music from the English folk scene, and to players like Danny Thompson and Dave Pegg."

Thinking back to some of his favourite bassists, Stirratt cites the studio giants known for their melodic sensibilities. "Joe Osborn is one of my favourites, without a doubt. He's a player that you aspire to be like. His playing on Simon and Garfunkel's *Bookends* [1968] and *Bridge Over Troubled Water* [1970] is just so enjoyable; all of the counterpoint is amazing.

"There's also Tommy Cogbill. I remember hearing 'Son Of A Preacher Man' when I was really young, and the bass completely moved me. I also have a real appreciation for Lee Sklar's work in the Seventies, especially the smooth, nuanced finger-style playing on Gene Clark's record, *No Other* [1974]. And then there's Chris Hillman, who inspired me to buy a Guild Starfire in the first place. It's amazing how he just picked up the bass as a beginner and did what he did with the Byrds."

"McCartney will always be the gold standard. He writes songs within songs on bass, with amazing melody and muscle. I'm still trying to learn Beatles bass parts: I go back to them whenever I can. That should be required, I think, for every bassist."

Thanks to his obsessive musical knowledge and plenty of experience in the studio, Stirratt goes into the session with a goal in mind. "I try to provide a good rhythm track with Glenn [Kotche, drums]. Alongside his innovation and creativity, he also has a great pocket and feel for what the song needs. It has to be something that can be built on by the other instruments. With this record, I was very intent on keeping the right vibe – giving people something substantial to play off of, and guiding things with a certain direction and feel. I do think that with the bass, you can change the tone of different parts and decide to be more flowery or sparse. I try to find a really good rhythm track that aids the melody."

Stirratt also has an aptitude for chord inversions and recognises how flexible the harmony of folk music can be. This stealth tactic takes a familiar sound and adds colour by nudging our ears toward something other than the root note. Referring to the song 'Handshake Drugs' from *A Ghost Is Born* [2004], Stirratt mentions how working with producer Jim O'Rourke inspired him to "find something memorable that really starts from a different place. There's a lot to beginning on a fifth or a third and trying to work your way down to where the root is." This approach was put to good use on the *Cruel Country* tracks 'Many Worlds' and 'Country Song Upside Down'.

"It's wonderful to have this camaraderie with a larger group and to work on your craft"

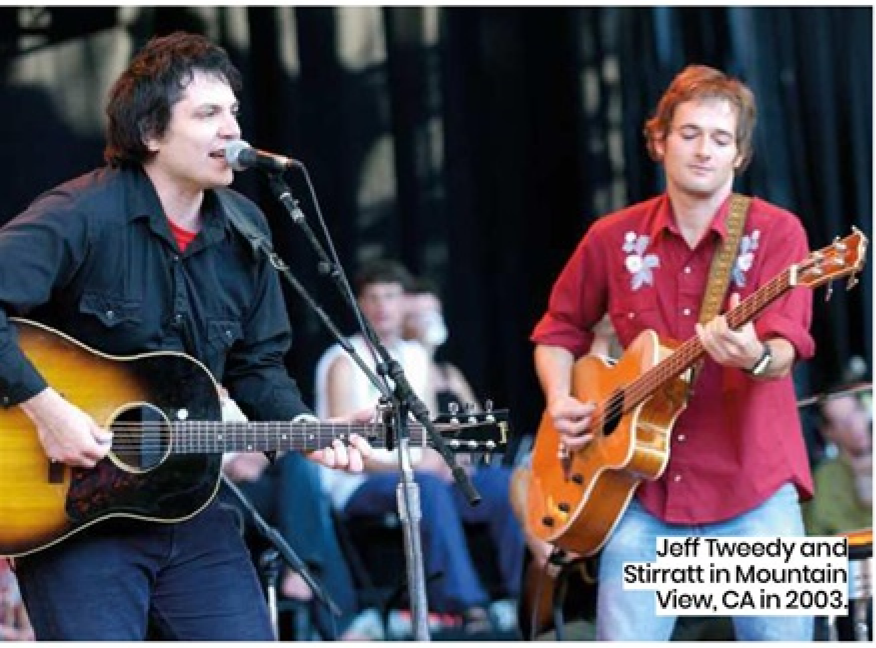
Crafting parts and harmonising alongside Jeff Tweedy, both as a vocalist and as an instrumentalist, has gotten easier over time. "There's a second nature thing about playing off of his voicings. It's really innate. With Jeff playing all acoustic on this record, it's a very comfortable place for me, and I can often feel where he's going. There are interesting parts and I'm playing off of the arpeggiated stuff that he does. A lot of the mid-tempo stuff is in our DNA and has been established for a long time, since *Being There*. Even singing with Jeff, I can make my voice sound exactly like what it needs to be. We've got this brotherly thing happening after all this time."

Even though they can anticipate what might happen, there's still a mystical element that keeps Stirratt returning to the studio. "I think it's the magic of a take, frankly, beyond anything. It's the chills that you get when you come down on the last note or when you listen to the playback. You think 'This might be pretty special'. That's the drug, for me. It's trying to find magic in the air and going after that. It's what makes everything else worthwhile."

Capturing that magic often happens quickly, especially when recording with everyone on the floor. "With Wilco, things happen live, and the first take could really be the take. We talked about it not being unlike a Nashville session. When we started to take on more of a cosmic country direction, we realised that so many of the records we liked were done this way – pretty fast – and I think the Buck Owens or Seventies Waylon Jennings records were like that. Plus, Jeff had great live vocal takes and this material really lent itself to that. I think that now, we work so much faster and we're just better at what we do."

And they really have been working together for a long time. Making a lifelong career of playing in

© Tim Mosenfelder / Getty



Jeff Tweedy and Stirratt in Mountain View, CA in 2003.

With Michelle Zauner in Austin, Texas in 2021.

© Erika Goldring/WireImage, Jeff Kravitz/FilmMagic

San Francisco, 2015.

Wilco isn't something that came easy. Like any band, their success didn't go in a straight line: it took almost a decade to find the right collection of players.

"Going back to the Nineties, it was no holds barred, substances, and the gamesmanship that happens with kids in bands. Around 2005, we were getting out of that. We didn't have the aspects that you have in young bands during their first few years – the power moves or Machiavellian stuff going on. It's really been incredible. We've had this 'third act' for 18 years now and I feel like I've grown with this line-up. It's wonderful to have this camaraderie with a larger group and to work on your craft and your own instrument. We have it so good in a way, with an older, more traditional rock and roll mentality."

When the band isn't on the road, each member continues to seek out musical opportunities – an extremely important aspect for growth and continued creativity. Upon reuniting, they bring that experience to the stage and studio. "Pat Sansone is doing Nashville sessions, Nels Cline is in the jazz world, and there's a sharpness that people bring back to the situation. It's all learning, it's all experience. That's what I've always really loved. Playing with a different rhythm section keeps you sharp and gives you different ideas. Some of the times I've been most stifled is when I couldn't converse or have musical conversations with other people."

Now that they're hitting the road again, the task of learning material for festival dates and touring season can be an intimidating task. In addition to working through Wilco's material, Stirratt is also getting reacquainted with music from The Autumn Defense, a side project with multi-instrumentalist Pat Sansone.

"The catalogue is huge, and I do find that any sort of playing helps with muscle memory and the connection of old material. Even as I'm learning songs, I'm just playing a lot. In this situation, I'm learning 21 songs: the whole new record. The preparation is daunting in terms of the amount of material, and there are covers to learn too. I like to work on stuff in the early morning; I tend to wake up and run the material a couple of times because that's when I retain the most. We also get vocal stems and I drive around and learn the vocal parts. That's something we weren't able to do before, so it's pretty deluxe to have that now."

Despite all of the time and preparation that goes into touring, Stirratt still has a bucket list and sincerely appreciates the band, crew, and fans for showing up time and time again. "Iceland is somewhere I still haven't played, and I'd love to get to Africa sometime. I love going to most of the places and they're still really magical to me – even the Midwest and places we've been to a million times. The support from the fans and the crew is great; it's always been this culture in and among itself. There's a heavy social implication to it, and the fans get together and it's beautiful. The crew is like that too. I'd like to say that it's a reflection of the band, but it's even more than that.

"We can't believe this is still happening and I have to say how fortunate we are," he says. "No-one could ever ask for more."

KEY MOMENT

Be a musician, or take the safe route? Solo bassist **Juna Serita** weighs in on a tricky decision...

"I first started playing the guitar, since my original music inspiration was making songs and singing rather than playing any instruments. Instruments just helped with that. However, there was a Japanese band called the Blue Hearts that inspired me to play guitar, so I decided to be a guitarist and vocalist.

"Originally, I was doing some covers and originals, but whenever I performed live, every other guitarist played solos so well, but I really couldn't – that was my first musical frustration in my life. My lack of talent on the guitar made me not want to play it any more. Later on, I got the idea that even though I can't play the guitar well, maybe if I reduced the two strings from the six strings, it might be way easier to play. That's how I started on bass.

"At the time, music was just a hobby: I was working three different part-time jobs at the same time, while I was a high school student, to buy gear. I used all my money and time on that and did nothing else. Then I started thinking, 'I have to make a decision about my life. I should stop putting energy into music and get a stable job, or put all my time into becoming a professional musician.' I knew that if I become a pro, then all of this time and money wouldn't be wasted, but actually invested. Luckily, my grades weren't that good and I had no confidence to work in general society, so I chose to become a professional musician.

"My very first bass was a Photogenic. At the time, it was the most affordable bass I could find, and it helped me to start playing bass right away. Eventually, I felt like I was getting better at bass much faster than guitar, so I bought the second one pretty soon after, which was an FGN. I enjoyed this one because it was a simple instrument, sounded good, and wasn't too complicated, meaning I could use it for live performance as well.

> "I knew that if I became a pro bass player, all of this time and money wouldn't be wasted, but invested"

"My latest album is called *Battlefield*. The basses I play on it are both Sadowsky Slapmaster basses, one a four-string and one a five. I play a Phil Jones Bass BP800 amp head with two of their C4 cabinets.

"I'd say some of my favourite players are Rocco Prestia, Bootsy Collins, Flea, Louis Johnson and Marcus Miller. Funk music inspired me in many ways, and these players are the main reason why I want to keep improving on the bass. A great piece of advice is: don't focus on the phrase first, feel the groove first."

Instagram: @junaserita

THE SOUND

Soreption's **Rickard Persson** nominates 10 bassists who are taking metal playing to the next level

Metal bassists may not be as flashy as their six- or seven-string counterparts, but there are countless bassists out there elevating the act of plucking four to eight strings to an art form. One of these is Rickard Persson of Swedish tech-death headspinners Soreption, whose playing is frankly off the scale: check out one of his YouTube playthroughs if you don't believe us. But which bassists get the seal of approval from Persson himself?

OF METAL

STEVE DI GIORGIO
DEATH, SADUS, TESTAMENT ▲

"A true legend and an absolute giant of the scene, and someone I've looked up to a lot over the years, Steve really influenced me with Death and Sadus – his fretless playing, with the fresh look of it all, really brought tons to the scene in my opinion. A game changer."

© Javier Bragado / Redferns / Getty

EUGENE ABDUKHANOV
JINJER ►

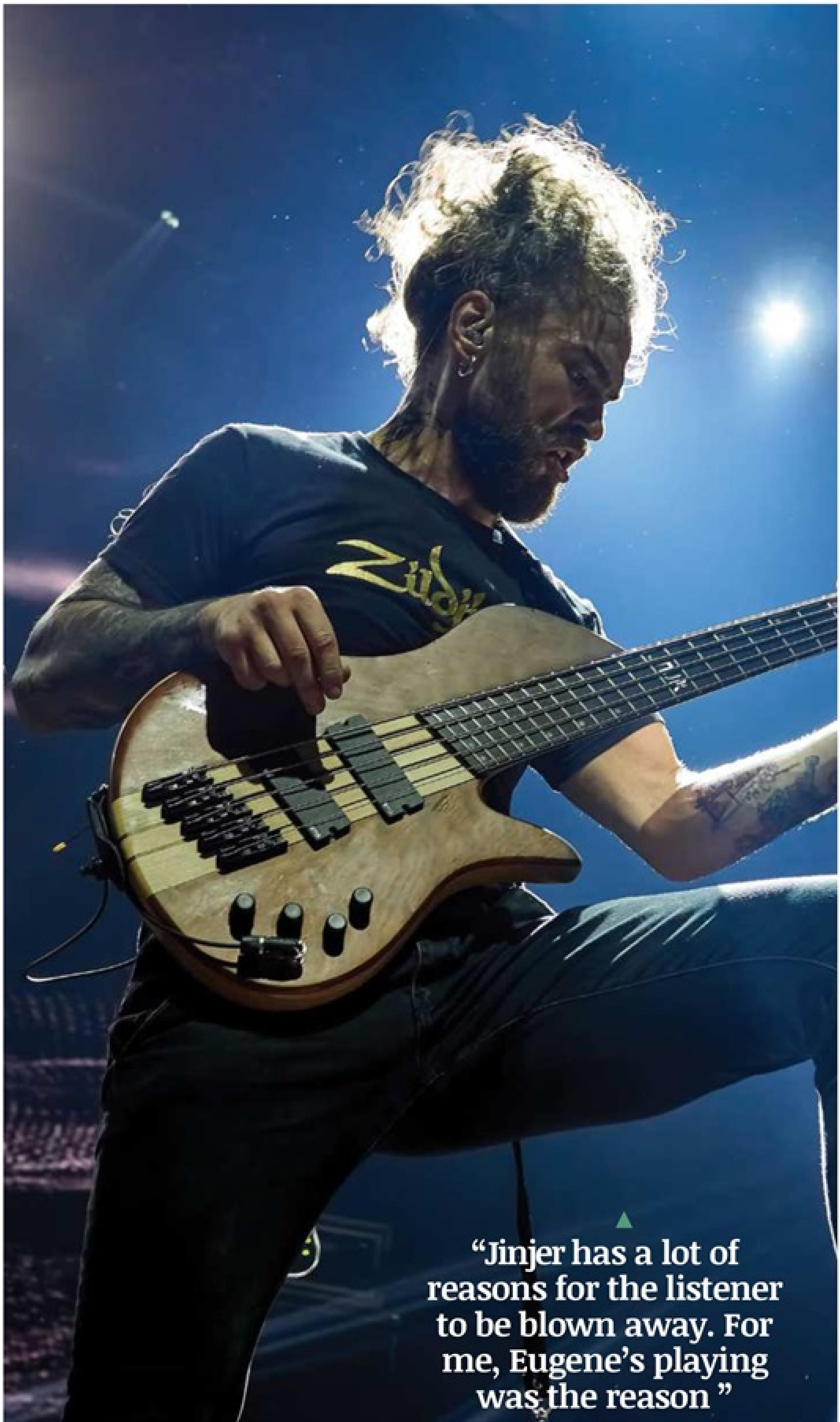
"I first heard Jinjer around two years ago, and of course that band has a lot of reasons for the listener to be blown away. For me, Eugene's playing was the reason. A really great tone, combined with intriguing ideas regarding rhythmical patterns, surely hits home! I hope I'm able to see them live one day or even better, tour together."

OLIVER PINARD
CATTLE DECAPITATION AND CRYPTOPSY

"This dude is just a straight ripper of the bass, putting that fine Spector Euro LX to work in Cattle Decapitation and Cryptopsy. They're two bands that I hold dearly. Cryptopsy were the first really extreme and technical death metal band I got to hear, and I remember being totally blown away with the sound and the playing. And then at a later stage in life, discovering Cattle Decapitation: they have become one of my favourite bands."

ALEX WEBSTER
CANNIBAL CORPSE ▼

"The all-father of the metal bass, the main man! He's been a truly inspirational figure for me when it comes to playing. His tone is just unprecedented, and you just know it's him every time you hear him play. I looked a lot at his techniques when I got into playing, and I tend to always go back to him in search for inspiration. A personal hero."



MIKE FLORES
ORIGIN

"I remember being introduced to Origin by a good friend who was like 'Dude, you should really check these guys out'. So I gave them a shot and now I have a squirrel on a bike running things in my head where my brain used to be. The saying should really be 'Fast, faster, Mike Flores'. Crazy speed and great technique!"

ERLEND CASPERSEN
SPAWN OF POSSESSION, ABHORRENT

"In my opinion, the absolute best. A beast of a player, like nothing I've ever seen or heard before. So fluid in his playing and so precise and aggressive, a true inspiration. Spawn Of Possession is just the freaking best for me – and Erlend's playing is the driving force. An icon!"

Abdukhanov: © Mihail Siergiejevicz/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images Webster: © Joy West/WireImage

JEROEN PAUL THESSELING

OBSCURA ▲

"Another fretless cat is Jeroen Paul Thesseling, bending really heavy strings with his seven-string bass in Obscura. That fingerboard scares the life out of me, I'm feeling light-headed just looking at him play. With his fusion and jazz-inspired playing, he can let it rip with that monster of a bass."

SEAN MALONE

CYNIC ▲

"A personal gem for me and one that we lost too soon. Sean's playing really is up there with the greats, and his tasty progressive fretless bass work made him a pioneer and a master of his craft. Cynic is a great inspiration and so was Sean's playing. He's sincerely missed."

JARED SMITH

ARCHSPIRE ▲

"Jared Smith of Archspire is a really good friend and a really serious player on the scene – and he is one of the current great death metal bassists, in my opinion. Archspire's records *Relentless Mutation* and *Bleed The Future* absolutely kill. From absolute shredding to tasty playing, he can do it all. I'm really happy that I've had the privilege to tour with him and that I was able to watch him perform every single night."

STEPHEN FIMMERS

NECROPHAGIST

"One of the reasons I got into technical death metal was Stephen Fimmers. He's basically the reason that I'm in Soreption, because without him I wouldn't have gravitated towards that style of music at such a rapid pace. His playing on *Epitaph* really flipped a switch inside me and made me pursue the craft of being a death metal bass player. No slapping, no plectrums... just fingerstyle at an amazing pace and great technique."

Malone: © Sean Malone Smith: © Brad Ardley Thesseling © Jeroen Paul Thesseling

DB 599 BASS COMPRESSOR
DC
COMP
GAIN
DB599
aguilar
ENGAGE
Tailored around the specific needs of bass players, the DB 599 utilizes musically appropriate compression ratios and attack / release parameters to make dialing in your compressed tone a breeze.
AGUILARAMP.COM
BARNES & MULLINS
Multiple Winner of The UK's 'Best Supplier' Award

GEAR Reviews

Welcome to our expert road-tests of state-of-the-art bass gear

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, bass cabs and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's useful for bassists, but generally speaking, this zone is reserved for bass-specific gear.

We take our reviews seriously. *BP* is the last English-language print magazine devoted solely to bass in the world, and we have readers all over the planet, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your time, we'll say so; if it's flawed, we'll make that clear. We're not answerable to advertisers in any way, and our tests are independent of the views of musicians, manufacturers and distributors.

Let us know what you think of our conclusions. Did we get it right?

Joel McIver, Editor

Reviewed this month...

48
MUSIC MAN
DARKRAY 5
$2,799, www.stringsandthings.co.uk

52
CHARVEL
PRO-MOD SAN DIMAS PJ V
£1,119, www.fender.com

54
TRICKFISH
BULLHEAD MINI 500 AND MINI 112 CAB
£740, £680, www.bassmatters.nl

MUSIC MAN
DarkRay 5

The DarkRay saga continues with the addition of a five-string model. Chris Gill goes low

FROM $2799

Last year, Music Man captured the hearts, minds and fingers of thousands of bassists by revealing the company's collaboration with bass effect and amplification specialists Darkglass Electronics on a new bass model called the DarkRay. Combining features of the beloved Music Man StingRay with built-in Alpha (distortion) and Omega (fuzz) circuits and a new two-band EQ preamp designed by Darkglass, the DarkRay was an instant hit. Now, Music Man has returned, offering a five-string version of the DarkRay.

Build Quality

In essence, the DarkRay 5 is a single-pickup StingRay 5 Special with Darkglass electronics and a handful of slightly different specs. The neck is crafted from roasted maple and features 22 high-profile/wide stainless steel frets, an 11" radius, a 1.75" nut width, and a single choice of fingerboard, made of ebony.

Music Man's signature five-bolt design solidly attaches the neck to the body, and the heel is generously rounded to facilitate playing comfort around the highest frets. Music Man doesn't specify the exact tonewood used for the body other than 'select hardwood', but our example weighed in at a reasonably comfortable 9.4 pounds (4.3 kg).

> **Even the knobs here feel classy, with a firm-but-silky-smooth action**

Whereas last year's DarkRay four-string came in either Obsidian Black or the limited Graphite Stone finishes, the five-string is offered with either grey sparkle Starry Night or limited White Sparkle high-gloss polyester finish options, with the former featuring a plain headstock while the latter has matching paint. The top-loaded steel bridge with steel saddles, neck plate, and round string tree for the A and D strings on the four-plus-one headstock have a matte black finish, while the knurled dome-top metal control knobs and tuners are gloss black. Two compartments for the 9-volt batteries that power the preamp, EQ and effects are located on the back.

Our DarkRay 5 arrived nearly perfectly set up, needing just a minor tweak of the truss rod: we have lots of love for the Music Man easy-access truss rod wheel that can be adjusted without special tools. Every single detail of the fit and finish was perfection, from the rock-solid neck-to-body joint and expertly capped, crowned and polished frets to the mirror-like shine of the Starry Night finish, which is decidedly more uptown bling than the downtown industrial vibes of last year's Graphite Stone paint job. Even the knobs feel classy, with firm-but-silky smooth action similar to that of the controls on an expensive studio mixing console.

STRINGS & THINGS
www.stringsandthings.co.uk

Sounds And Playability

The original StingRay bass is known for its distinctive midrange character. The DarkRay, however, lives up to its name by delivering an inherent tone that is warmer and richer with the preamp-only setting engaged and the treble and bass EQ controls centred, although the StingRay growl comes out in the Alpha and Omega settings. Many players will consider this a bonus, as it tames pick attack and string slide noise while bringing core musical notes even more to the forefront. The noise-free specs of the Darkglass electronics provides an excellent clean base that keeps harsh overtones and attack transients under control when the distortion and fuzz beasts are unleashed.

Perfect for StingRay lovers who want even more tones and textures

The ring around the Gain control for the Alpha and Omega effects illuminates blue when the three-way switch is set to Omega, red in the Alpha settings, and is unlit when the preamp-only setting is engaged. Omega's distortion effect scoops out the midrange slightly, while the mids are more prominent with Alpha's fuzz, which is more of a smooth Big Muff-style effect than a sizzling classic fuzz like that of a Gibson EB-0F Fuzztone bass. The Blend control adjusts balance between unprocessed and distorted signals, which is especially helpful for maintaining clarity for more percussive styles or dialling in fat, compressed tones. The Gain control can also be backed down to provide just the slightest hint of grit in the Alpha or Omega settings, providing a useful range of textures.

Although the Alpha's fuzz effect fortunately never gets flabby or farty, I found that it made the low B string sound less clear and defined than when the Omega distortion was engaged, which enhanced the low B's punch and growl. The Darkglass treble and bass EQ is an improvement over the classic StingRay EQ and a better complement to the humbucker, with its powerful neodymium magnets, than the StingRay Special's three-band EQ, capable of dialling in a wide range of highly desirable tones with deeper, rounder bass and shimmering treble.

Conclusion

The Music Man DarkRay 5 is perfect for players who love the StingRay's feel, tone, and character but want even more tones and textures. Fuzz and distortion enthusiasts who don't mind always having these effects first in the signal chain will like the instant access – and metal, punk, and progressive players may never use anything but the aggressive, gut-punching Alpha and Omega settings, free at last from the tyranny of the pedalboard.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | $2,799 (White Sparkle $2,899)
Made In | USA
Body | Select Hardwood
Neck | Roasted maple, 34" scale, gunstock oil and hand-rubbed special wax blend finish
Neck Join | Bolt-on, five-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 1.75"
Fingerboard | Ebony, 22 frets
Pickup | Single humbucker with Neodymium magnets
Electronics | Active
Controls | Volume, Gain, Blend, Treble, Bass, three-way blade switch (preamp, Alpha/preamp, Omega/preamp)
Hardware | Matte and gloss black hardware, five-saddle Vintage Music Man top-loaded steel bridge with steel saddles, custom Music Man lightweight tuners with tapered string posts
Weight | 9.4 lbs / 4.3 kg
Gigbag/case included? | Hardshell case
Left-hand available? | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Distortion/Fuzz circuits optimised for bass, stellar craftsmanship
Minus | Electronics and light wear batteries quickly
Overall | Incredibly versatile and useful tones plus convenience of effects at fingertips

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE
★★★★★★★★★☆

CHARVEL Pro-Mod San Dimas PJ V

Charvel's new five gets a new DiMarzio: Joel McIver gets nostalgic

FENDER
www.fender.com

£1119

We reviewed Charvel's relaunched San Dimas bass models a year ago, partly because we're suckers for Eighties chic around here and a day-glo finish always gets our collective heads spinning. More importantly, they were and remain highly playable, fully-featured active basses that acknowledged their *Bill & Ted*-era roots but added modern touches for today's player. They continue to occupy a midmarket position in the low four figures, too. Now the five-string San Dimas has been beefed up with a new Area J DiMarzio pickup in bridge position, hence its reappearance, with new black and white finishes that are a little more mature than the vivid options of last year.

Build Quality

First off, Charvel and the brand's owner Fender are presumably keenly aware of the value of these instruments' legacy from the late Seventies, when real men wore denim and a flannel wristband was as essential as a cab the size of a fridge to any self-respecting bassist. However, rather than simply clone the old basses, stick a $4000 price tag on them and sell them to nostalgic "business leaders" in their fifties, they've kept the cost down to a relatively manageable level and added the power and tone range that your modern bass player requires.

What this means in practice is an alder body for familiar tones and weight, a graphite and maple neck that is almost comedically fast under the fingers, and a focus on general practicality that should make the San Dimas easy to work with. There may only be 20 frets, so very high-register playing is out, but at least you can get up there with ease thanks to the deep lower cutaway. There's a range of solid hardware – a hi-mass bridge, open-gear tuners and heavy-feeling controls – that are designed to work without any fuss, and a heel-mounted truss-rod adjustment wheel for that quick pre-gig tweak.

Sounds And Playability

Eighteen volts of power has almost become the default in today's look-at-me-on-YouTube era, but never fear, the 9-volt battery we have here is capable of powering some monstrous tones. Make sure the volume pot is pushed down to the body, so you're in active mode, and roll on any of the three EQ controls. The treble and mids pots perform in a bitey, aggressive manner that you can (and should) use to irritate your drummer, while the bass boost is truly huge, especially when you hit hard on the low B string.

There's a pickup blend control that actually makes an audible difference, quite the revelation given that such controls often have little value, which brings us to the new DiMarzio bridge pickup. Zero in on it and you're rewarded with a subtler performance than this otherwise enjoyably over-the-top bass might suggest. DiMarzio themselves caution that this pickup is not intended for high overall volume; instead, it allocates punch to the centre of the tone. In use, this means that it gives you clarity and a precise feel, which adds some edge to the overall sound you get when you add in some input from the much bigger-feeling split-coil.

This is a very playable instrument, with a neck profile that players of basses by Jackson and other shred-friendly marques will recognise. The slippery, flat maple neck gets flatter as you approach the heel, and the rolled fretboard edges really help you get from bottom to top at speed. Fun as this slinky feel is, you might prefer an old-fashioned sticky baseball-bat neck if you want to play slowed-down reggae or soul – although there's no reason why you can't use any bass for more or less any genre of music nowadays, is there?

Conclusion

For around $1100, or £1100 if you prefer, you're getting a lot of bass. The new San Dimas five is solid, sleek and professional, and offers 99 percent of all the tones you would ever need. It looks and feels great, and plays flawlessly, with the only possible hesitation before purchase being the fact that there are hundreds of other, equally tasty basses available at this exact price point. In that case, your incentive to buy it is the Charvel name and heritage, both assets that should help with its value retention and (admit it) bragging rights.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £1119
Made In | Mexico
Body | Alder
Neck | Maple, graphite reinforcement
Neck Join | Bolt-on, four bolts
Fretboard | Caramelised maple, 20 frets
Pickups | DiMarzio Area J DP551 at bridge, Charvel Split-Coil P in middle
Controls | Three-band active EQ, pickup blend, master volume with push/pull selector for active/passive modes
Hardware | Charvel tuners and hi-mass bridge
Weight | 9 lbs / 4 kg (approx)

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Very playable; tone range is impressive
Minus | 20-fret range may hinder soloists
Overall | Excellent homage to a vintage style, with added modern touches

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE
★★★★★★★★☆☆

TRICKFISH Bullhead Mini 500 and Mini 112 Cab

Think small, think cool: can this agile amp match its competitors? Steve Lawson finds out

PAUL'S BASS MATTERS
www.bassmatters.nl

£740
£680

Trickfish have now been around for almost a decade, making highly regarded heads and cabinets as well as preamps, and have built up an impressive list of pro players who swear by their range. The Bullhead Mini 500 and Mini 112 are the newest additions to their line. Let's see if they live up to the reputation of their larger, more powerful siblings.

Bullhead Mini 500

The Mini 500 is instantly recognisable as a Trickfish amp. The same in-line six-knob layout as the larger amp heads is present, and it sports the same Mike Pope-designed four-band preamp. Gone are the frequency selector switches for the EQ bands, but otherwise it's what we've come to expect from Trickfish, balancing the versatility of two bands of mid control with the ease of use of a simple cut and boost EQ section.

The headphone socket and line-in have been moved to the back panel, part of a series of adjustments that have made the Mini 500 significantly smaller and lighter than previous Trickfish units. The front panel is rounded out by a -10dB pad switch for hotter signals, and a mute switch. It's clean and simple without lacking any essential features.

On the back we have a DI out with ground lift and pre/post EQ selector, a combined jack/Speakon speaker out and an effects loop that's placed handily before the level indicator, so any pedals can be factored into setting the optimum input signal. No surprises, but nothing missing.

So what does it sound like? The first thing you notice is how usable every EQ band is across its whole range. The treble, set at 8Khz, adds air and sparkle without a hint of brittleness. This is particularly striking on slap sounds where the pops are way more present but not significantly louder than with the treble down. The bass control, at 80hz, offers fullness and body rather than mud.

It really feels like a lot of time has been taken to get the Q (the width/slope of the EQ) right, so there are no surprising or disrupting edges to the sound when you cut or boost particular frequencies. The fixed frequency mid controls are broad enough to be highly usable in shaping your tone, or controlling how present your bass is in a mix without the sensation that the centre frequency is off.

However, the striking thing about the Mini 500 is how responsive it is to everything across the frequency spectrum, so if you wanted more EQ, adding one as a pedal works wonders. Both the superpower of the Trickfish sound, and potentially the thing that would make some

players look elsewhere, is that it is incredibly transparent. It's as close to a 'Full Range' bass amp as I've come across. Even the gain control adds no noticeable harmonic enhancement: it just sets the level of the input signal, making it perfect for amplifying sounds that you've developed with pedals or an FX unit elsewhere.

For pedal junkies, the Bullhead Mini 500 is a godsend. It also has the quietest fan I've ever encountered on a bass amp, making it perfect for low level at-home playing and recording. Nowhere is this transparency more apparent than when pairing it with the Mini 112...

Mini 112

Trickfish's speaker range already includes a 112 cabinet, so the addition of the Mini 112 invites a bunch of questions, including 'Why add a second one?' Well, as the name suggests, it's significantly narrower, width-wise, by approximately four inches, and consequently lighter. It's one of the most compact 1x12 cabinets I've ever tried, although not the lightest: the birch construction and metal handles and corners leave it feeling robust and therefore able to handle some volume without rattling off the edge of the stage.

The back panel for the 8-ohm cabinet is simple, with a level control for the tweeter and two combi jack/Speakon connectors. The tweeter control is an attenuator, so fully up is just 'on' and anything else reduces the level. This would be useful for a more muted, vintage tone, but in most situations leaving it wide open makes the most sense.

With everything set flat on the head, the notched zero positions on the EQ knobs making this particularly easy, the cab sounds present across the frequency spectrum with a slight mid boost but no significant tonal bias either way. If you're used to a more hyped low end, you'll be reaching for the bass control on the head straight away. Thankfully the amp is more than capable of dealing with a ton of low end. While the 'flat' sound is more balanced, it's quite possible to get a dub-heavy tone at the kind of volume you'd expect from a 1x12 cab.

This setup isn't designed to keep up with a drummer in a metal band and definitely isn't the best choice if you spend most of your time playing a five-string in drop-A. For situations where portability is a must and the volume requirements are more modest, though, such as rehearsals, recording sessions and folk or jazz gigs – especially paired with a second cabinet – it's ideal.

What makes it such a perfect match for the Mini 500 head is the transparency: its ability to amplify anything across the frequency spectrum. There's none of the harshness that often comes with tweeters in bass cabs when you run a lot of treble into them, and none of the woolliness that can plague larger cabinets. With the bass boosted on the amp just a fraction, every nuance of my sound is apparent – whether it's just a passive bass plugged straight in, or a full suite of pedals and effects running multiple loops and layers. Every aspect of the EQ in an active bass is pleasingly replicated in glorious detail. The slight mid-boost noted earlier can be easily compensated for with the on-board EQ, but in a live situation it can really help a bass sound shaped in isolation actually carry all the way to the audience.

Back in the Nineties, one American boutique builder used the slogan 'the sound in your head is in this bass', and while that may or may not have been entirely true, it's certainly the case that the sound of your bass is in this amp. The Trickfish Mini 500 and Mini 112 do a sterling job of faithfully reproducing whatever you throw at it.

If you're looking for an amp with a signature sound of its own, you may be disappointed, but for clarity and versatility when handling a huge range of effected or clean bass tones, it's tough to beat.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

MINI 500 AMP

Price | £740
Made in | USA
Power Output | (4 ohms) 500W (8 ohms) 250W
Features | Class D amplifier, all-analogue solid-state preamp, 1/4" phone input with switchable attenuation and rotary gain control, signal level and clip LEDs (green/red), four-band EQ with shelving bass and treble, Variable Gain Band Pass Low-Mid and Hi-Mid, master volume, line in, headphones out, mute switch, effects loop, balanced direct out, XLR, Pre/Post, Ground Lift, Neutrik speakON connectors, five-year limited warranty
Dimensions | H 2.77" x W 10.55" x D 7.87" / H 705 x W 268 x D 200mm
Weight | 3.5 lbs / 1.6 kg

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Transparent, lightweight, well thought-out EQ
Minus | Fixed frequency mid controls aren't for everyone
Overall | A remarkably clean, powerful and well designed amp for its size

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★★
VALUE
★★★★★★★★★☆

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

MINI TF 112 CAB

Price | £680
Made in | UK
Power | 300 watts RMS, 600 watts peak handling
Speakers | 1 x 12" proprietary Neodymium speaker built by Eminence, HF driver (3500-20,000 Hz) 80° conical horn
Frequency response | 35Hz-16kHz
Features | Custom crossover with peak protection and HF Attenuation, 2 x NL2 Combo connectors, 16 gauge steel grille, 22oz sharkskin vinyl
Dimensions | H 17" x W 15.25" x D 12.25" / H 432 x 387 x 311mm
Weight | 29 lbs / 13.2 kg

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Compact, robust, amazing clear high end
Minus | A tad light on the deep low end
Overall | A wonderful addition to the world of pro-level compact speaker cabs

BP RATING

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★★★★★☆
VALUE
★★★★★★★★★☆

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Bass Lessons

Making you a better bass player in every issue, our state-of-the-art team of educators will guide you every step of the way. Say hello to them here!

I SPY... 60

RYAN MADORA

Dig into your favourite bass parts… and discover treasure!
Ryan Madora is one of Nashville's most sought-after touring and session bassists. Recent touring and session credits include Robben Ford, Kyshona Armstrong, and her instrumental trio, The Interludes. For the past five years, she has served as musical director for Bobby Bones and has played with Garth Brooks, Darius Rucker, and Carrie Underwood. In addition to instructing at Nashville's campus of Musician's Institute, Ryan has taught at Gerald Veasley's Bass Boot Camp, Rock'n'Roll Fantasy Camp, and at universities across the USA. She has contributed columns to No Treble for over a decade and in 2019, published her first book, *Bass Players To Know: Learning From The Greats*. Ryan offers online education at TrueFire and her website.

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BEGINNER 64

STEVE LAWSON

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here
Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across more than two decades of touring, and a huge catalogue of solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for almost three decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists – but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?

www.stevelawson.net
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INTERMEDIATE 68

PHILIP MANN

Now you're rolling, it's time to hit the next level
Philip Mann studied at the London College of Music, securing bachelor's and master's degrees in performance before receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. Endorsed by Overwater and Eich, he's a busy, internationally freelancing electric and double bassist. His performance and session credits include work with Grammy Award-winning artists Van Morrison and Albert Lee, five-time Grammy Award nominee Hunter Hayes, Deep Purple's Steve Morse, Leo Sayer, Billy Bragg and country artist Peter Donegan. Author of the *Chord Tone Concepts* texts, Philip is currently a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School while simultaneously lecturing for Scott's Bass Lessons.

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ADVANCED 74

STUART CLAYTON

Take the bass world by storm with advanced study
Stuart Clayton has been a professional musician, writer, and transcriber since 2002 and has worked in function bands, on cruise ships, theatre shows, and more. He spent four years recording and touring the world with Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer, and was one of the original writers at *Bass Guitar* magazine. From 2007 to 2019, Stuart worked as the Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Bristol, where he taught all levels of the degree course. In addition, he has also worked as the Bass Guitar Technical Specialist for the Rockschool exam board. Stuart now runs Bassline Publishing, which publishes transcription books for bassists such as Mark King, Stuart Zender, Marcus Miller, Stuart Hamm, and Bernard Edwards, as well as an acclaimed range of tuition books.

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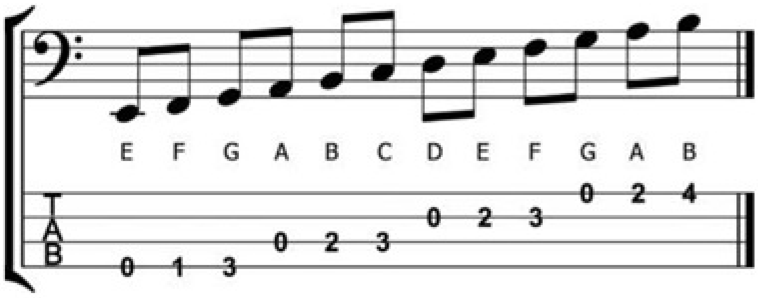
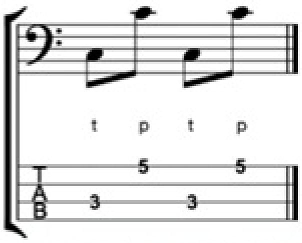
BP Notation Legend

The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in Bass Player magazine

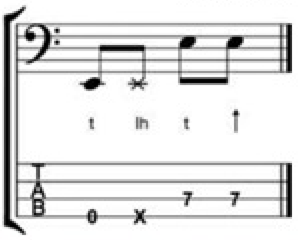
The Stave: Most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the stave.
Tablature: This is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature stave will have five or six lines as necessary.



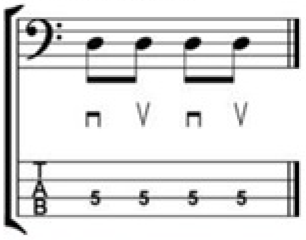
PLAYING TECHNIQUES



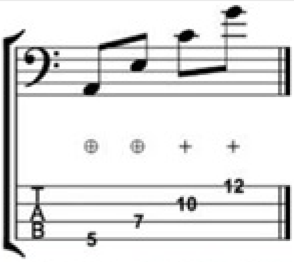
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE
Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a 't', notes popped with the fingers marked with a 'p'.



ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE
Fretting hand slaps are marked 'lh' and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow.

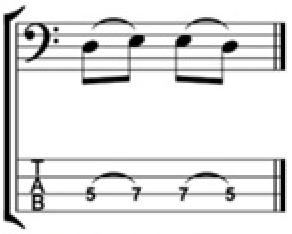


PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up).

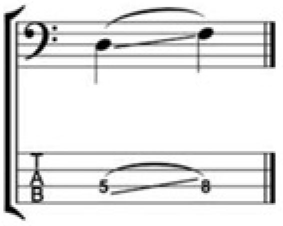


TAPPING TECHNIQUES
Fretting hand taps have a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are just '+'. Particular fingers may be shown with numbers.

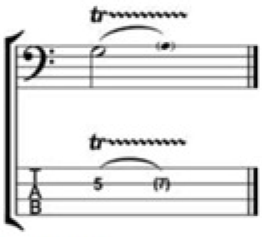
FRETTING TECHNIQUES



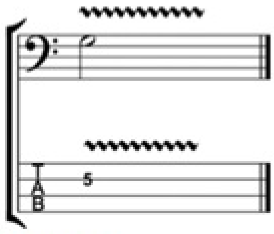
HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF
These are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand.



SLIDE (GLISSANDO)
Slides are performed by playing the first note and then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note.

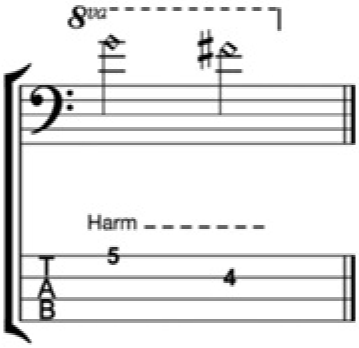


TRILLS
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown, using hammer-ons and pull-offs.

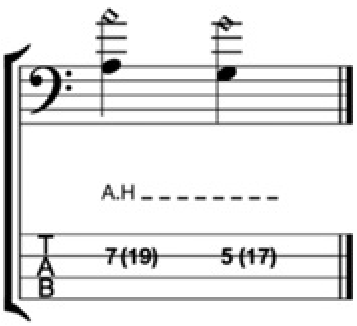


VIBRATO
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger.

PLAYING HARMONICS

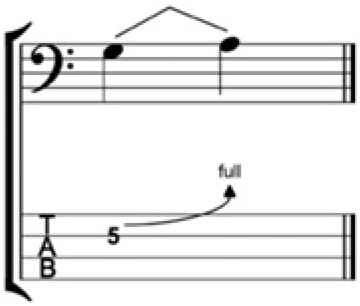


NATURAL HARMONICS
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated.

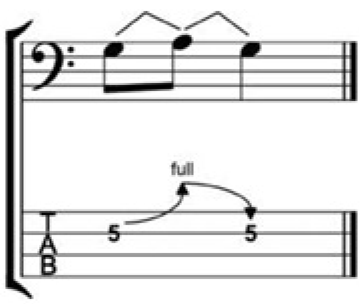


ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS
Pluck while fretting the lower note and touching the edge of the picking hand thumb to the note in brackets.

BENDING NOTES



BEND
The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: ½ indicates a semitone, 'full' indicates a tone.



BEND AND RELEASE
The note is bent up to the interval indicated and then released back to its original pitch.

I SPY...

CONNECTIVITY! PART ONE

In session and stage bassist Ryan Madora's amazing new column, we discover a stack of useful secrets hidden inside our favourite bass-lines

Hey there, bass players! I don't know about you, but when I sit down to craft a bass-line, I like to find a nice balance of flavours. Maybe I'll stick to something classic, like chord tones with a splash of pentatonics, or perhaps I'll add a few sour notes to tug at the listener's ear in the form of half-step dissonance. It's a delightful cocktail of sorts, complete with a few harmonious liquors and a touch of bitters. The process of mixing and matching notes that are deemed "right" with those that are deemed "wrong" can be a delicate recipe, but one worth mastering.

In our previous column, we discussed the use of half-step dissonance to bring tension into our bass-line, particularly when resolving to the root note of a chord. Depending on the style of music you're playing, the desire to add dissonance may need to be tempered. To do so, we're going to sandwich our dissonant note between two consonant notes and connect the chords.

By approaching our destination from either a whole step above or below, we can often play a chord or scale tone followed by a chromatic note as a method for setting up the next root. This allows us to take advantage of the voice-leading that we get from half-step dissonance, but with a slightly sweeter and more palatable approach.

Lucky for us, this method is great for integrating chromaticism, and it's easy to learn and conceptualise as a pattern for connecting chords. In fact, certain chord progressions, and extremely common ones at that, cater perfectly to this type of motion.

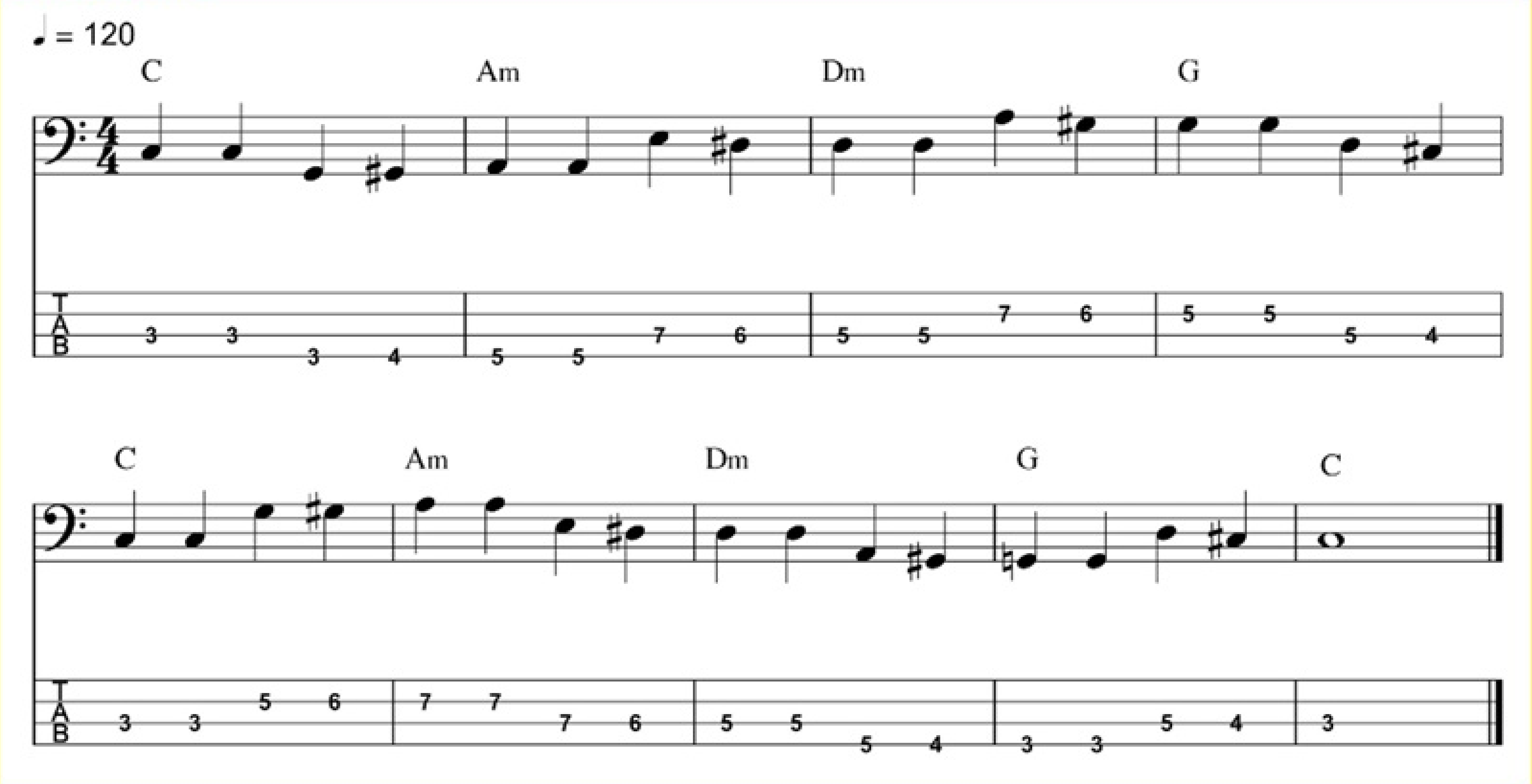
Typically found in jazz and pop, the I–vi–ii–V progression sounds quite harmonious and allows for this movement to take place. Most of the chords are a fourth apart: the vi–ii, ii–V, and V–I all feature this intervallic distance. When moving a fourth, you can easily play the fifth of the chord you are currently on, and either ascend or descend chromatically to the upcoming root note.

Let's look at these relationships in the key of C. Here, the vi chord is Am and the fifth of the chord is E. Since our destination point would be the ii chord, Dm, we can move down chromatically by playing E–E♭–D. Therefore, when we're moving a fourth away, going from Am to Dm or vi–ii, we now have a tried-and-true method for using half-step dissonance and connecting the chord tones.

Let's practise this in **Exercise 1**. The I–vi–ii–V

The process of mixing and matching notes that are deemed "right" and "wrong" can be a delicate recipe, but it's one that is worth mastering

EXERCISE ONE



Esperanza Spalding performing in 2019.

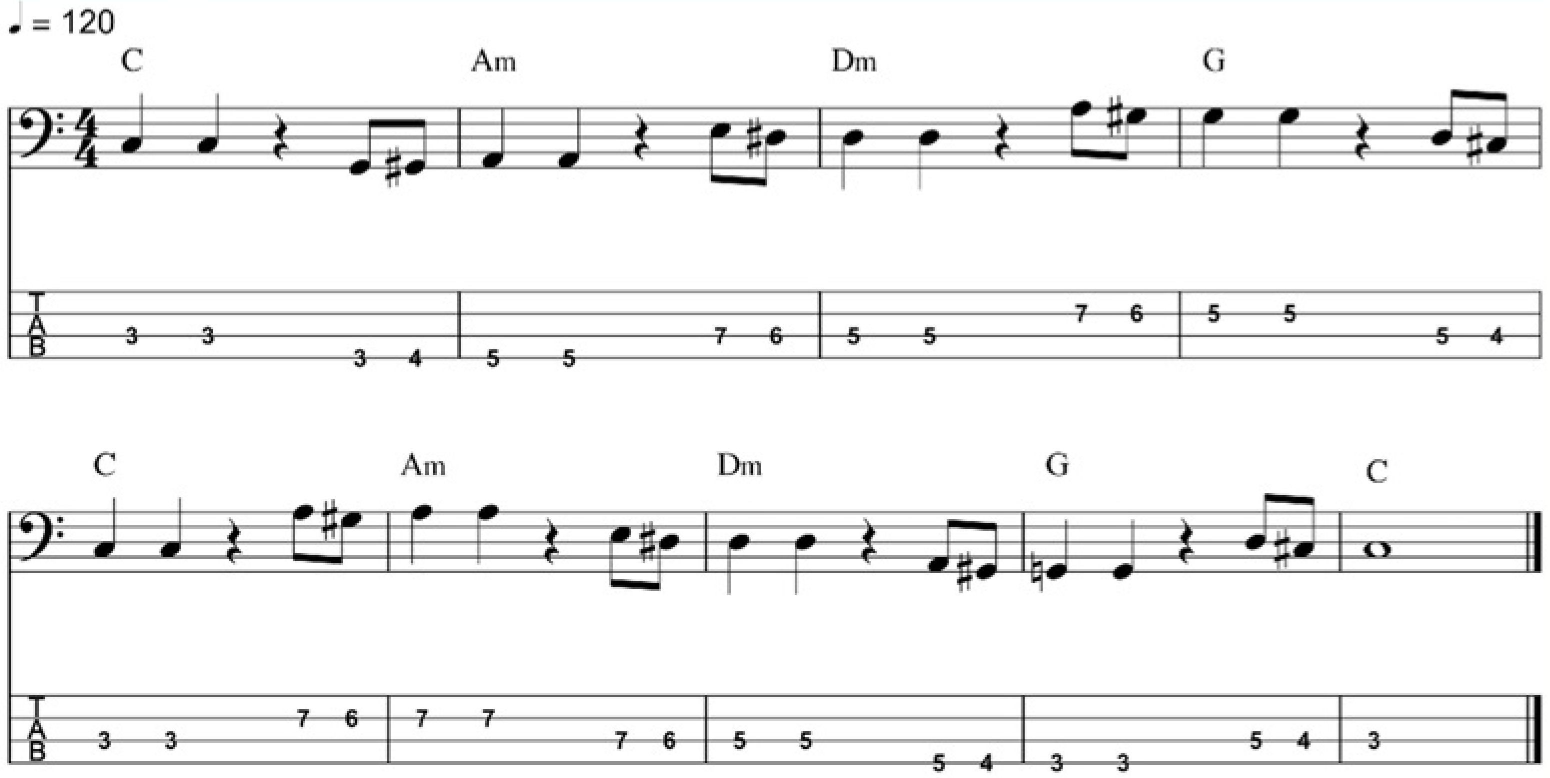
© Paul Marotta/ Getty

Ryan Madora

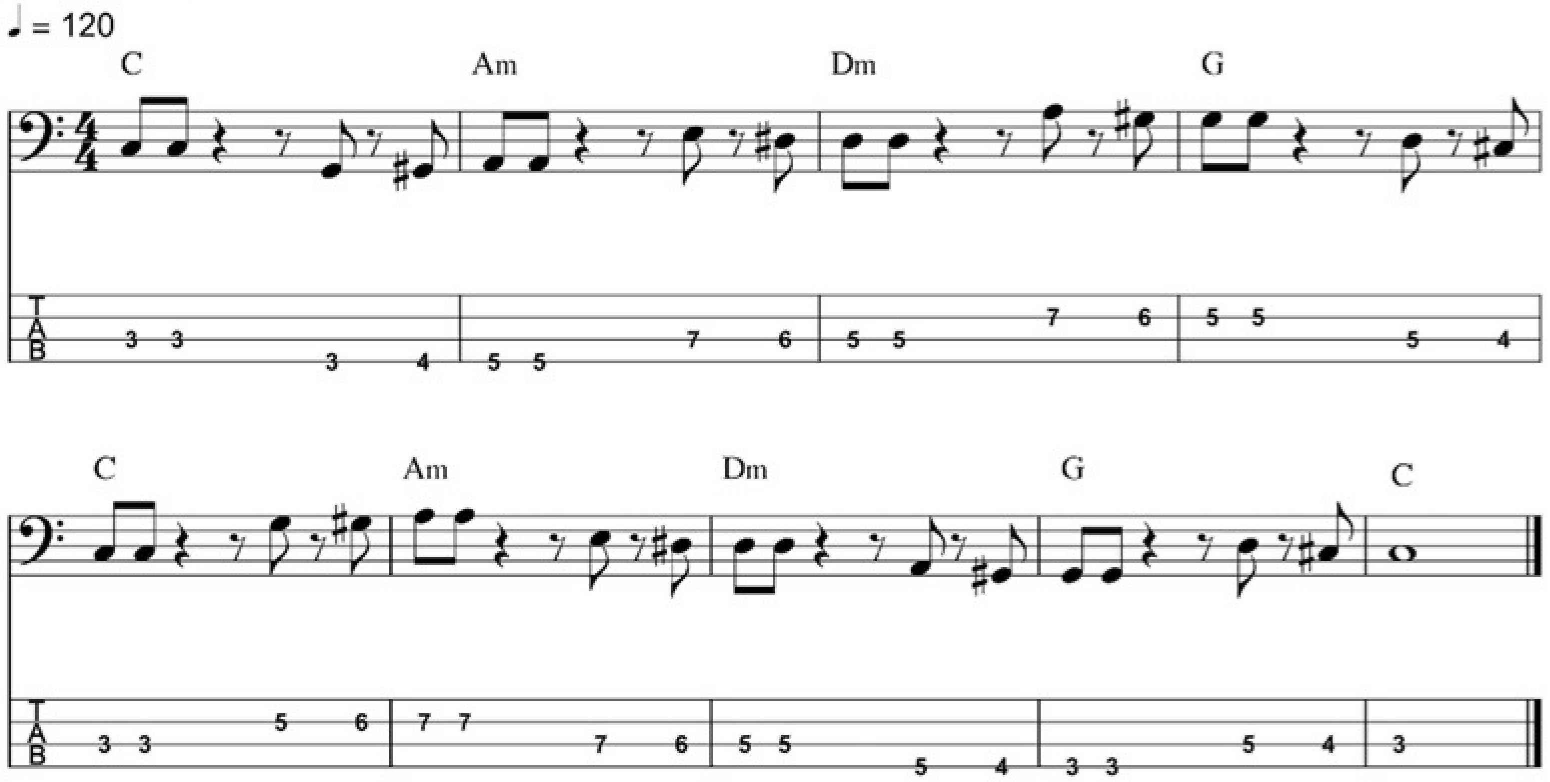
chord progression in the key of C will begin on C Major, then move to Am, Dm, and G Major. We'll play with a quarter-note feel to allude to a walking bass-line. First, play the root note on beats one and two. On beat three, play the 5th of the chord (G on the 3rd fret of the E string). On beat four, ascend chromatically and play the #5th (G#). This will set up our new destination point, the root note of the Am chord, to be played on the downbeat of the second measure.

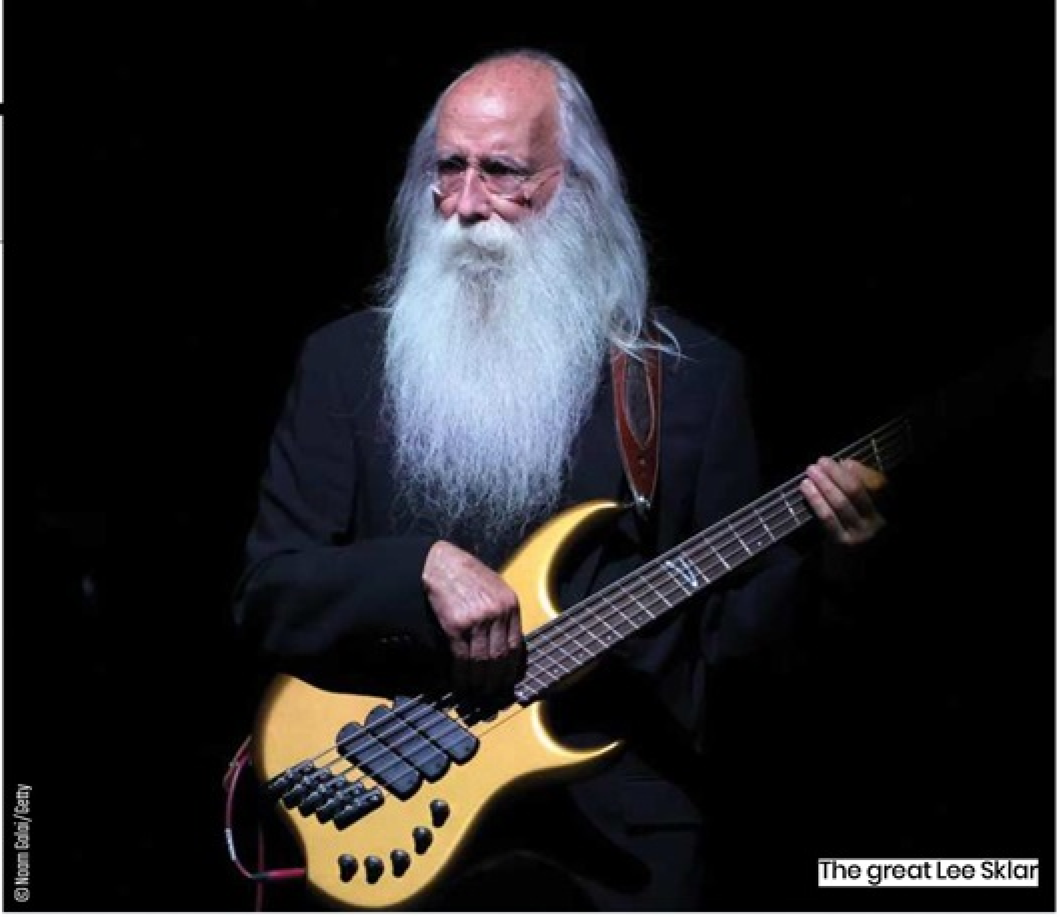
As you can see, we're approaching the new root by way of a chord tone and a chromatic note. This creates a sense of motion and provides a textbook example of voice leading. As you move through the progression, use the same method to set up each new chord. Once you've returned to C, repeat the progression but search for the root notes in other places. For instance, ascend to the higher G to set up the Am chord on the 7th fret of the D string.

EXERCISE TWO



EXERCISE THREE




© Noam Galai/Getty
The great Lee Sklar

In **Exercise 2**, repeat the same exercise but with a new rhythm. Instead of playing quarter notes for all four beats, play the root notes on beats one and two, then rest on beat three. Play the connector to the next chord using eighth notes on 'four-and'. Feel free to experiment with this and try to tackle the more syncopated rhythm in **Exercise 3**.

Let's switch up our chord progression and see if this method still works. In **Exercise 4**, we'll use a progression very common in pop, rock, and country: I-IV-ii-V. Still in the key of C, our chords will now be C Major, F Major, Dm, and G Major. Since this progression essentially substitutes the IV chord for the vi chord, we can still take advantage of this motion. Furthermore, the interval distance between C and F is a fourth, so we can easily play the root note of the C chord, the fifth (G) and then descend chromatically with G♭ to land on F.

While this doesn't work for every chord progression, there's a good chance that any song you're playing will include some kind of movement in fourths. Plus, we don't need to limit this movement to the fifth of the chord, but that's another lesson for another day. In the meantime, let's do some spying.

First up, take a listen to Esperanza Spalding's 2008 release, *Esperanza*, and the track 'I Know You Know'. The bass is featured loud and clear, gracefully demonstrating this technique as she moves through the chord progression. While there's a bit of extra dissonance thrown in, the method of approaching a root note is front and centre.

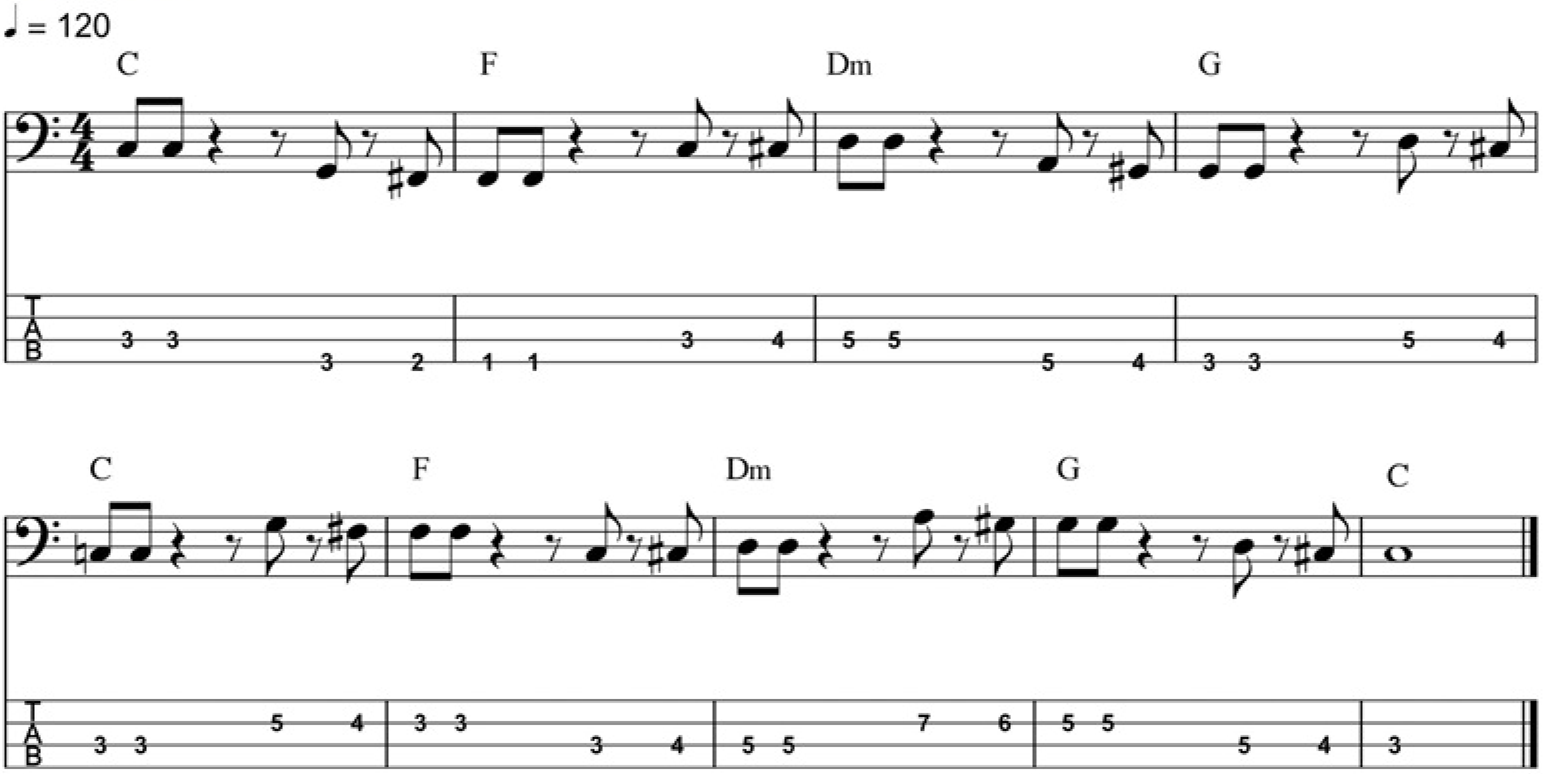
Next, throw it back to one of Stevie Wonder's biggest hits, 'Isn't She Lovely'. As the tune moves through the vi-ii-V-I chord progression, the bass-line has a bouncy feel that often goes between the root, fifth, and octave. Listen closely to hear how the bass connects the chords by moving chromatically from the fifth of one chord to the root of the next one.

Taking it back even further, listen to just about any jazz standard that features walking bass and this type of harmonic movement. One personal favourite is Frank Sinatra's version of 'Fly Me To The Moon'.

Enjoy practising these connectors, and I'll see you next month!

Depending on the style of music you're playing, the desire to add dissonance may need to be tempered

EXERCISE FOUR



START HERE!

LEGATO PLAYING MADE EASY

The great Steve Lawson is dealing with health issues this month, so let's revisit this classic lesson from a while back...

Welcome back! This month, we're going to look at an aspect of controlling your sound that is often overlooked, but which for a number of reasons has become more and more noticeable over the years – giving notes their full length.

The amount of decay we want in a particular note – from ultra-short palm-muted notes to infinite sustain – is a huge factor in shaping the sound of a line and its impact on the song. Today, we're looking at the sustain end of the graph.

The reasons why this has become more significant over time are both stylistic and technological. Style-wise, the prevalence of synth bass in much pop music has brought about a taste for incredibly smooth-sounding bass-lines – often with no gap between the end of one note and the start of the next.

Simultaneously, advances in bass guitar manufacture have also impacted the degree to which controlling the tail end of the note is a significant factor. A lot of older basses

The amount of decay we want in a note is a huge factor in shaping the sound of any bass-line

had a relatively short natural decay. That could be lengthened by using a compressor, but for the most part, there used to be a pronounced dip before the end of the note if we were playing anything longer than a half note at about 80bpm.

Modern bass construction favours instruments with super-long sustain. I remember my early recording sessions with my Modulus four-string in the Nineties, when engineers would be amazed at its sustain. It would even cause problems in lines where I needed to 'drop in' to replace part of a recording, because there was no obvious gap. With computer editing, that's way easier to fix, and a lot of modern construction methods have caught up with what graphite necks are capable of in terms of sustain. Our basses now demand a bit of a rethink in terms of what we can do with all that natural sustain.

So, after that long introduction, let's get playing! The first thing we need to be aware of is just how long the sustain is on our particular instrument. Fret a D at the fifth fret on your A string and pluck it with whatever technique first comes to mind. Try and visualise the shape of the note.

We've talked before about the four parameters that we use to describe dynamics over time for any given sound – Attack, Decay, Sustain and Release, or ADSR. What would you say the ADSR of that note looks like? Big peak right at the start as you pluck the string? Slow-ish fade to a sustained quieter note, and eventually disappearing, right? How can our picking hand technique change that?

Try playing the same note – but this time, instead of plucking it with your fingers, 'squeeze' through the note with the side of your thumb, bringing your thumb to rest on

Comfortable fretting hand: a three-fret span

Brace a note with two fingers

the next string down. If you hear any fret buzz, you're pressing too hard. Experiment with the level of pressure that gives you the most sustain and the smoothest transition from peak to sustained note.

Our picking hand, as we've noted before, is our first tone control. Before we touch the knobs on our bass, amp or pedals, we can do a whole lot to shape the sound – and length – of a note with our picking hand. The distance our hand is from the bridge, the angle we move our finger or thumb through the string, even the amount of flesh of our finger that is in contact with the string will all impact the sound and shape of the notes we play. And when we're thinking about legato – and therefore slow – playing, we can extend our techniques beyond those we might use for playing a constant eighth note line or a more tricky funk line.

Here, we're reimagining what it means to be a 'beginner'. Your current lack of extreme dexterous ability doesn't mean that you don't get to apply your exquisite taste to the task of playing simpler lines. As we've noted in the past, many of the greatest moments in bass didn't require amazing amounts of dexterity, just great taste and controlled execution. These are both factors that we can work on from the very beginning.

Okay, now we've given some thought to how our technique can elongate and smooth out individual notes, let's try it with two notes! Our first move is going to be to try a hammer-on. It's a technique we've explored before, but this time, we're using it as our baseline (no pun intended) for what sustaining the first note as long as possible sounds like. With a hammer-on, the second note relies on the vibration of the first note for its volume and tone.

Place your first finger on a C at the third fret on the A string, pluck it, and after a second or two, hammer on with your little finger on the D at the fifth fret. If you find that your little finger struggles with this, you can brace it with either or both of your ring and middle fingers. If the stretch feels a bit much at this stage, move that same two-fret shape further up the neck to a place that's more comfortable.

Once we've got the motion comfortable, we can start to really listen. What's the volume difference between the two notes? What's the tonal difference? Does how close to the fret you place the hammer-on impact the tone or duration of the second note? Is there any buzzing? How do the variations in picking the first note that we've just been looking at change the relationship between the two notes?

This may seem like a crazy number of questions to ask of just two notes next to each other, but if we make these kind of observations part of our playing at this stage, you won't have to suddenly start listening to yourself properly when you've learned a bunch of Victor Wooten licks but finally notice that your tone, timing and articulation are terrible!

Fretting hand hammer-on brace

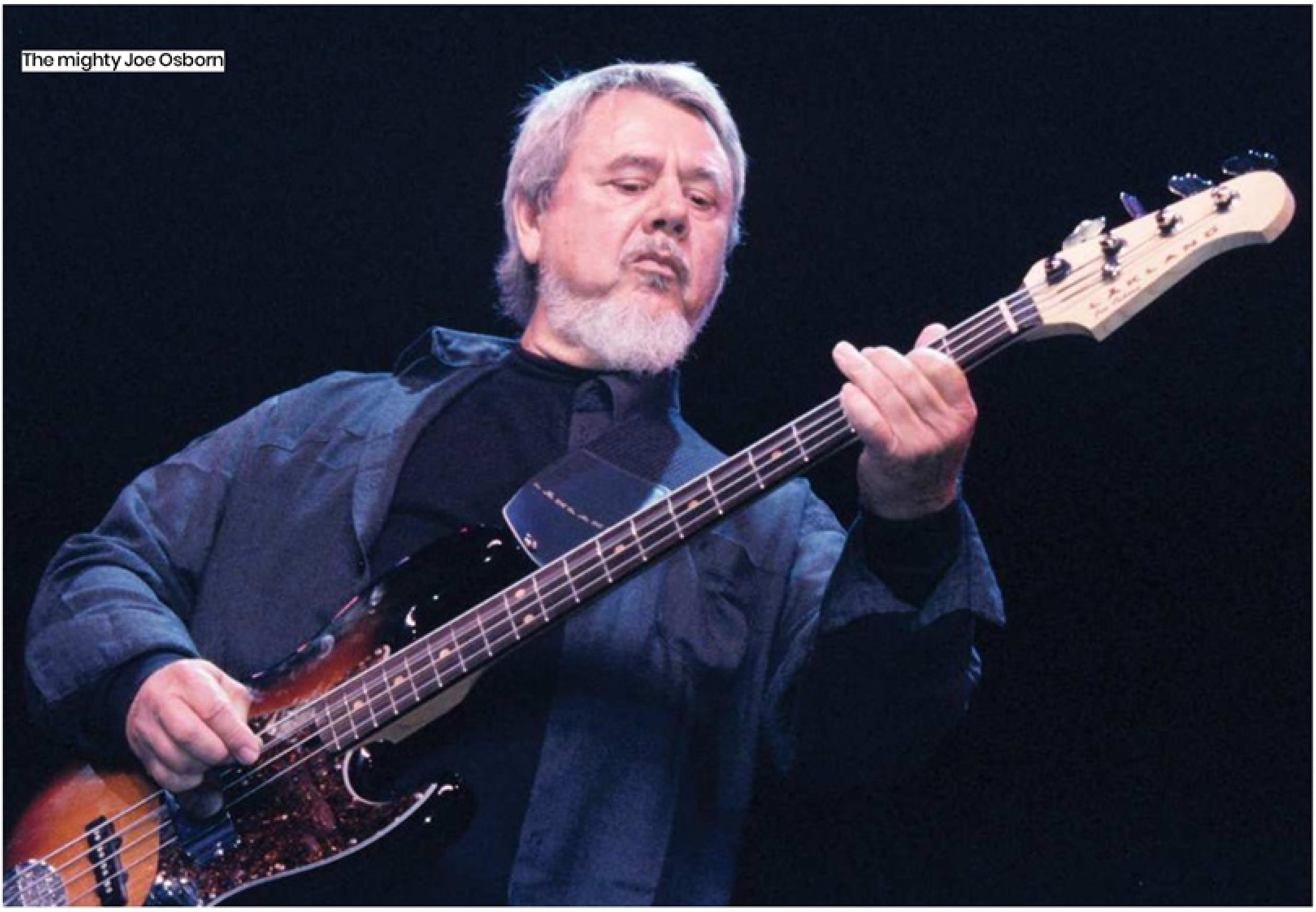
Picking fingers used together

Learning to control the signal before relying on an effect leaves you with many more options

Let's play those same two notes, only this time we're going to pick the second note with the same technique as the first. If that's with the side of your thumb, you may notice a tendency to bring your thumb down onto the string a fraction of a second before the note is supposed to sound, leaving a gap. Try to eliminate that gap, and as you adjust your fretting hand to reach for the second note, listen for fret buzz or for the first note decaying too fast if you release too much pressure off that first note.

This exercise is all about the details. If you're playing a line that's exposed in the mix, these elements become really significant. What we're trying to eliminate here, as much as possible, is any gap between the two notes – and we're trying to smooth out the dynamics of each note.

If you own a compressor pedal, hold off on using it for a while. They're designed to reduce the volume of any note above a threshold, and increase the volume of



The mighty Joe Osborn

© Andrew Lepley/Redferns/Getty

any notes that drop below it. However, learning to control as much of the signal as you can before relying on an effect leaves you with many more options in the moment.

On a number of occasions in my career, I've found I was a little too quiet, so I dug in harder to increase the volume, only to find that a compressor was thwarting my attempts at fixing the problem! So, long before we start messing with compressors, we need to sort out our hands. It gets even more tricky when we need to cross strings between notes. It's possible to hammer on notes on adjacent strings, but without the initial vibration of the note we've just played to carry on, we end up with less continuity. So we need to think about how our picking hand can move across the strings, as well as how we can make sure our fretting hand doesn't let go of the first note earlier than it has to. Let's look at two examples.

First, let's take the interval of a fifth, between a D on the fifth fret of the A string and an A at the seventh fret on the D string. This is a great test of how relaxed and comfortable our fretting hand is. Remember, you don't need to hold both notes down for the whole time, and if it feels like a bit of a stretch, it's okay to shift your hand between the two. What we're focusing on is making that transition as smooth as possible, and reducing the gap between the notes so that it's imperceptible.

It's important that we explore all the options so we know we've chosen the best, not just the first

With our picking hand, we can experiment with the same range of techniques we applied to our single string exercise, but we need to be aware of which strings our fingers come to rest on. If we're playing the fifth with our index or middle fingers, bringing that finger to land on the A string after playing the note is a great way to mute the D and have the two notes meet in the middle. No further muting action is needed in your fretting hand. We just have to work out whether we're going to get that finger out of the way to switch to a different one when we play the D again, or just leave the finger where it lands ready to play the note.

These are all decisions that depend on a number of factors, some tonal and some just to do with comfort. What's important is that we explore all the options so we know we've chosen the best one, not just settled for the first.

Let's shift the string-crossing exercise to a bigger hand position shift. This time we're going from D to E, but we'll play the E at the second fret on the D string – so we've got D at the fifth fret on the A string, and then we move to the adjacent string for the next note. For our picking hand, it's the same movement as the previous interval. But for our fretting hand, we're far more likely to need to pivot on our thumb to reach it in time. This is a co-ordination exercise: how we deal with the dead zone between our little finger leaving the D and our index finger arriving on the E. We also want to

These exercises can be approached in a lot of ways – why not see what a pick brings to the table?

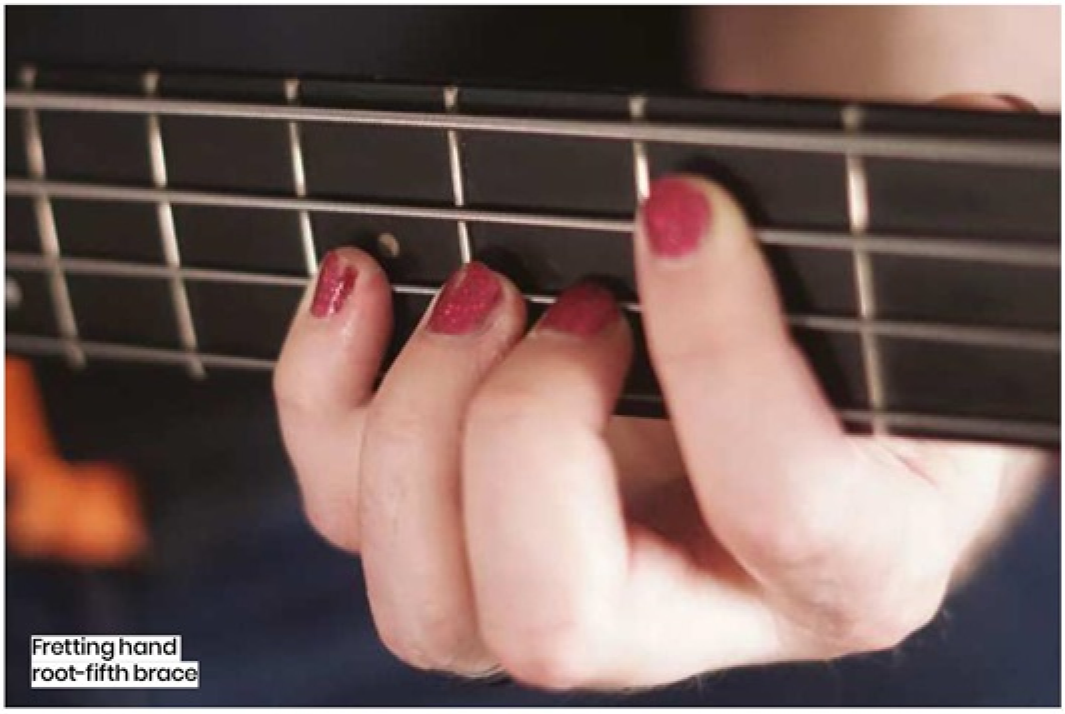
make sure that no strings are left ringing, or squeaking as our hand moves over them.

All of a sudden, playing two notes accurately becomes a maddeningly specific task, but if you're detail-oriented, giving yourself space to think about these things will pay massive dividends going forward. And if – as is the reality for so many of us right now – your main musical outlet is recordings, this skill will improve the quality of your tracks massively. You'll find that it's easier to EQ or process your sound after you've recorded it without discovering unwanted squeaks and scrapes that were hidden before you tried to add a trebly edge to your sound. The cleaner your playing, the more malleable it will be as you try to manipulate or edit it.

These exercises can be approached in a lot of ways. You can see what a pick brings to the table; you can try moving the notes across bigger intervals; or string together multiple string shifts to see if your hand position needs to change mid-note. You can try playing the same interval in different places on the neck to see if the thickness of the string impacts your tone in a desirable way. And obviously, we can start to mix up our line between shorter and longer notes.

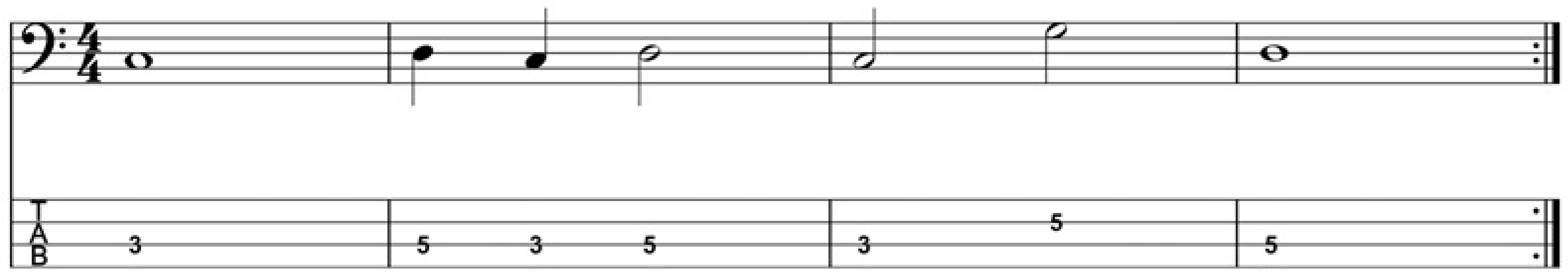
Let's finish with a line that uses both the intervals we've been looking at today, and mixes up the length. Take it slowly and focus on giving every note its full value.

Picking thumb playing through the string



Fretting hand root-fifth brace

EXERCISE ONE



If you only practise one thing this month...

Alternate between C and D on your A string, getting that shift as smooth and 'bump-free' as possible. No gaps, no rogue squeaks, no spikes in volume. Just smoooooth bass!

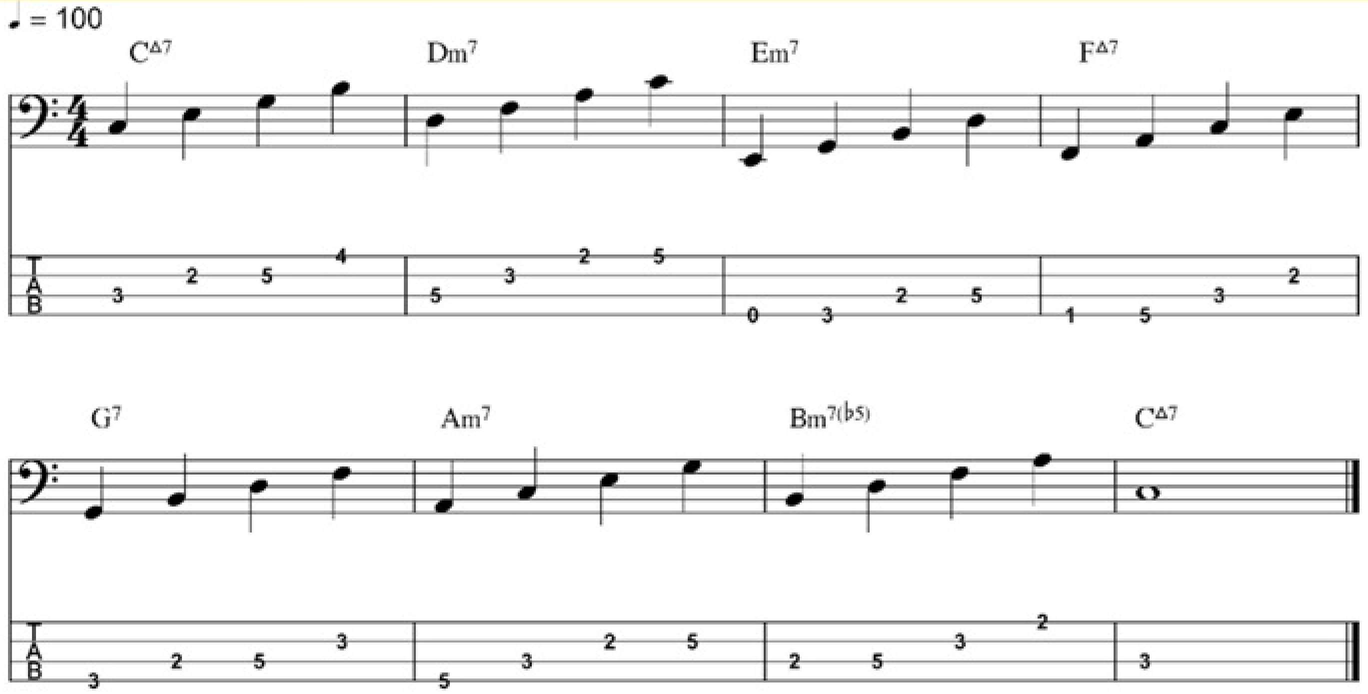
STEP UP!

MASTER MINOR 7TH FLAT 5 ARPEGGIOS

Phil Mann is a stage and session star and educator extraordinaire. Get ready to step up your bass game!

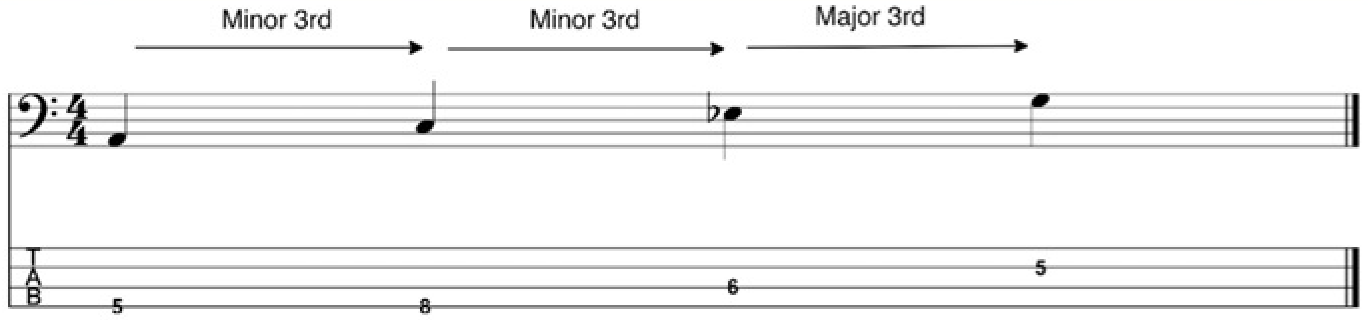
Did you know that contemporary music only tends to reference a few fundamental chord sequences – and that in the majority of those environments, the focus is generalised on those primary structures residing on the first, fourth and fifth harmonic degrees? That's why any structure found on the seventh diatonic degree is less familiar than its more common counterparts. Let's explore this!

EXERCISE ONE



Exercise 1 denotes the chords and arpeggios produced when the major scale is harmonised using tertian construction. These structures, their arpeggios, and most importantly, the order in which they're presented are a fruitful source of information, as this data is used to analyse and interpret the majority of contemporary music. Dissect each bar, memorising the chord names and accompanying structures, paying particular attention to the minor7th♭5 arpeggio in the penultimate measure, as it'll be the focal point of this month's studies.

EXERCISE TWO



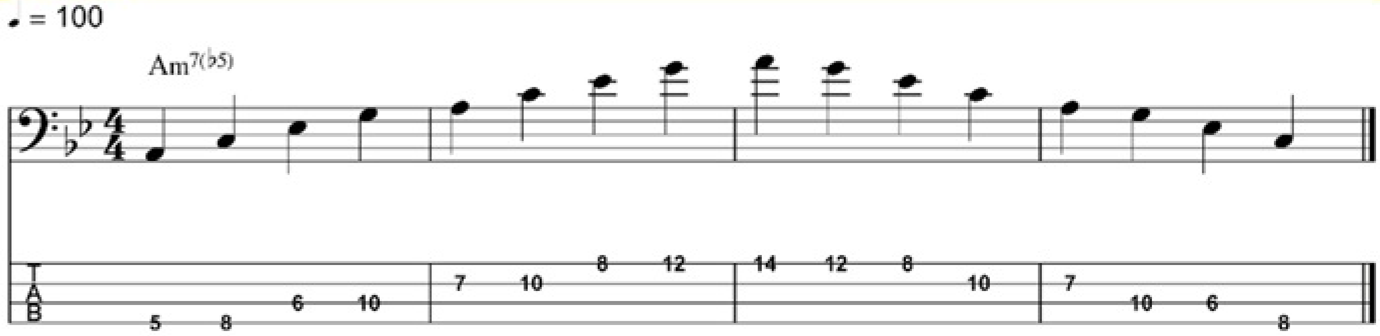
Like all 7th arpeggios, minor7th♭5 structures are formulated using tertian construction; the process of stacking of intervals of a third. As the name suggests, minor7th♭5 structures are simply a minor7th arpeggio with a flattened 5th, produced by stacking two minor 3rds, followed by a major 3rd. This sequence appears in Exercise 2, so take the time to learn the formula of any melodic, or harmonic structure, whether it's a triad, arpeggio, or scale.

Nova Twins bassist Georgia South

© Leon Neal/Getty

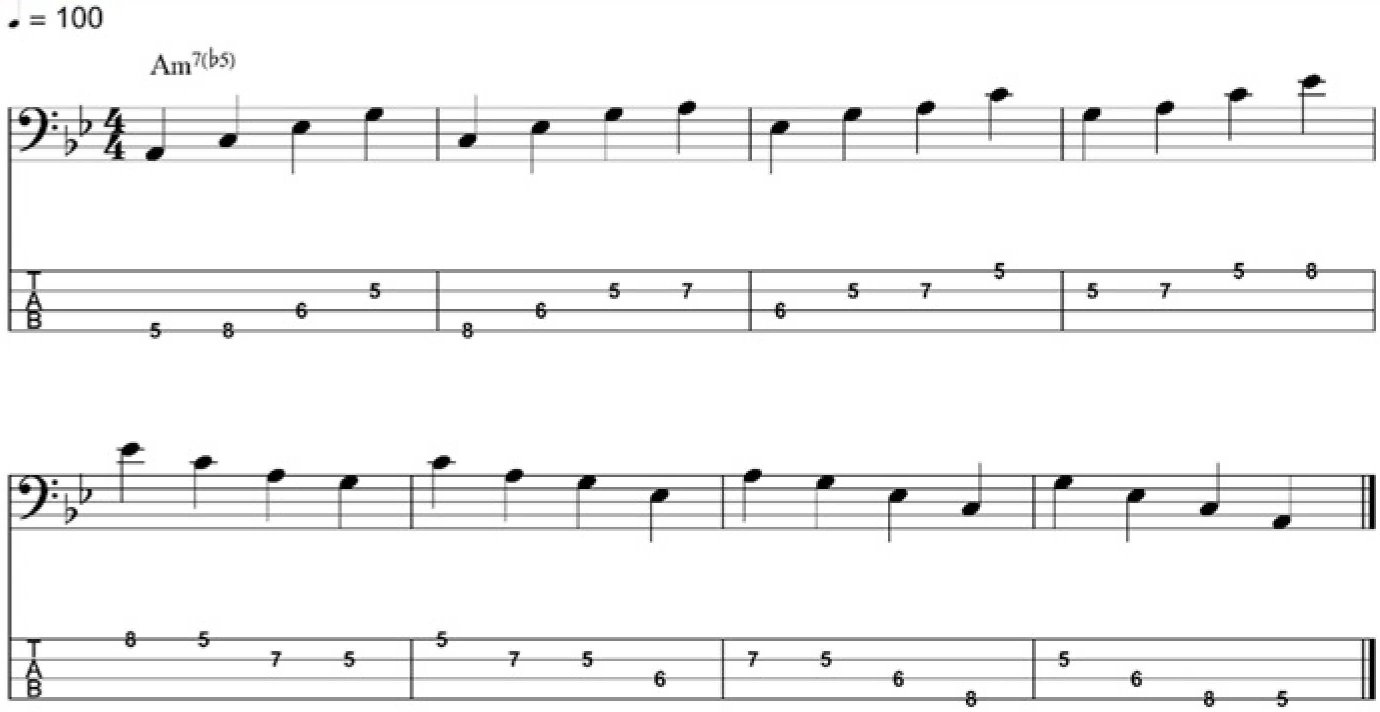
Take the time to learn the formula of any melodic or harmonic structure

EXERCISE THREE



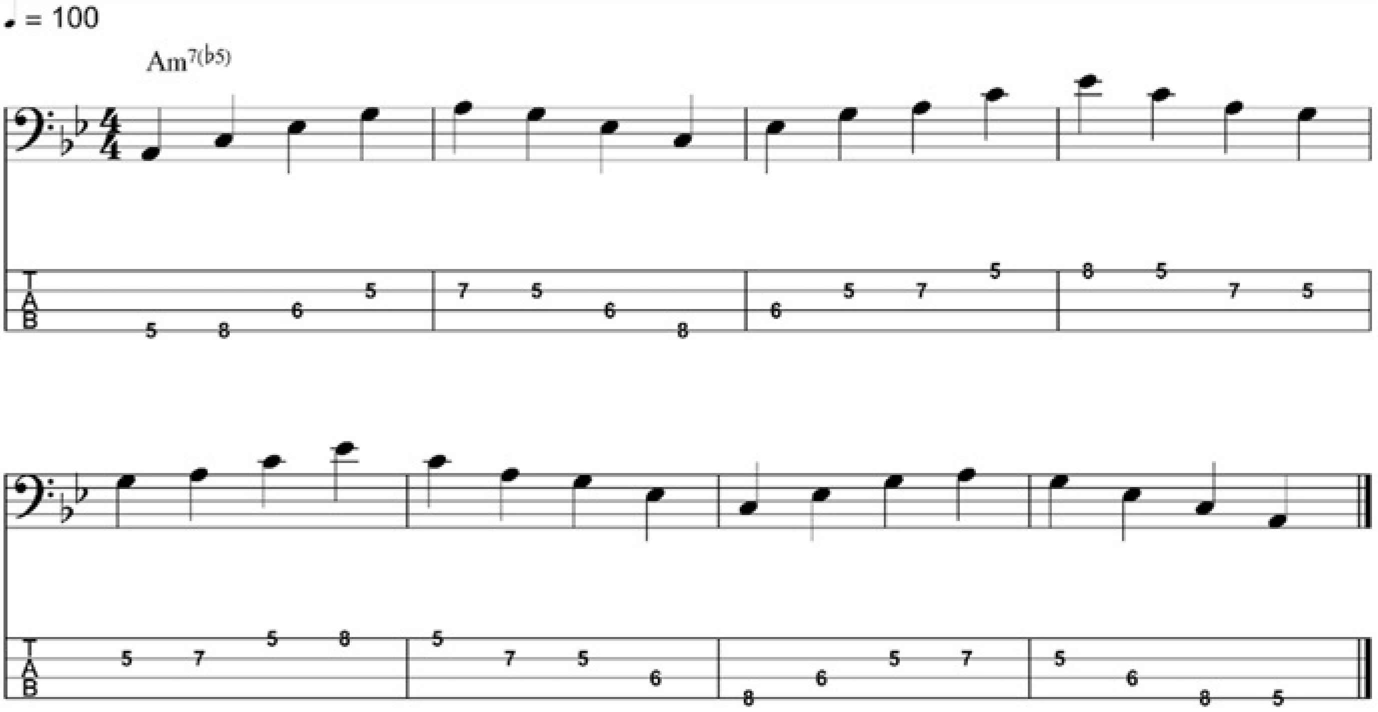
For ease, each of this month's studies will be notated using the appropriate key signature associated with minor7th♭5 chords when perceived as the seventh degree of major harmony, but be aware that it's more common to encounter these structures as two chords in minor tonality than as sevenths in major. Exercise 3 denotes the minor7th♭5 (or 'half-diminished') arpeggio over two complete octaves. It's possible to deliver this linear approach to the structure utilising only two fingers of your fretting hand, so try to play the exercise with just your index and little fingers in an alternating manner.

EXERCISE FOUR



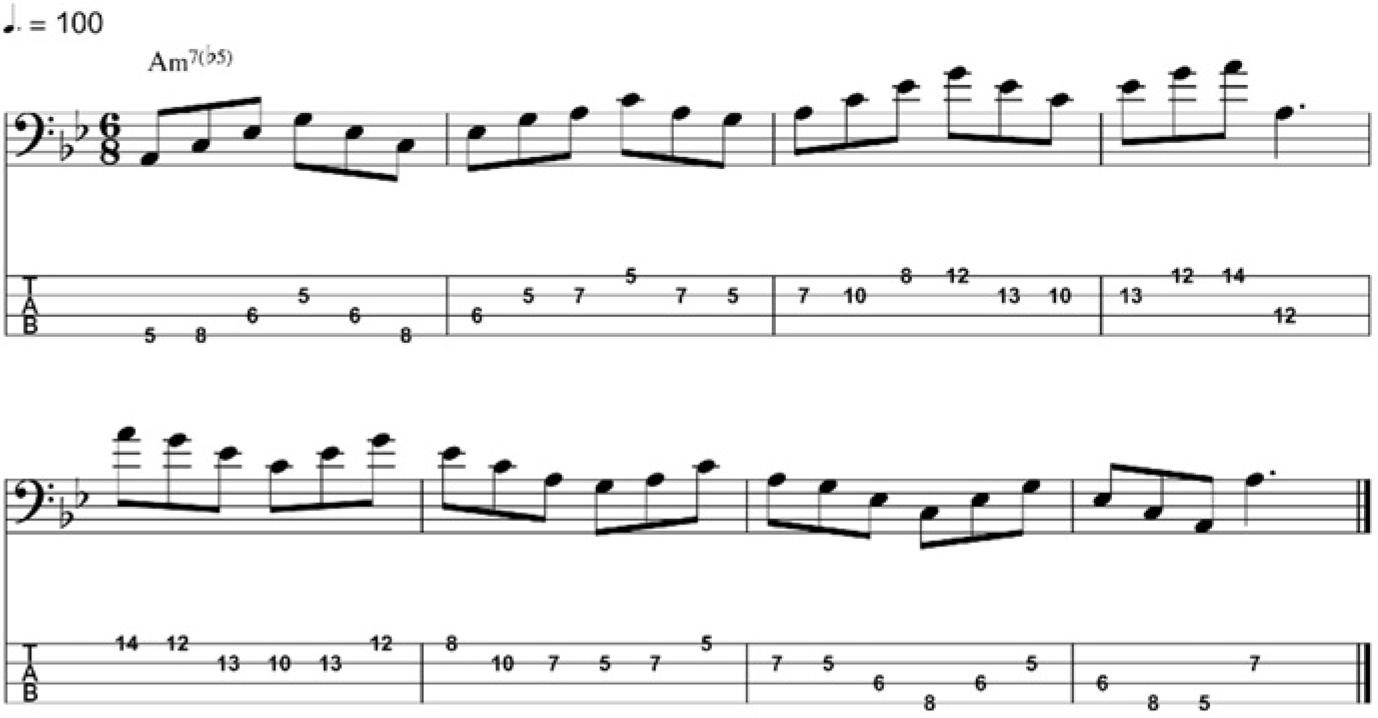
Many of you know that an inversion is a means to interpret melodic and harmonic vocabulary with an alternative perspective. Essentially, you're delivering the same vocabulary in an array of different circumstances, but the audible outcome from this process is enlightening. Exercise 4 delivers the minor7th♭5 arpeggio in root position and its ensuing inversions. In each instance, the lowest note of the preceding structure is repositioned an octave higher to form the next. If this process seems unclear, take a pencil and write the names of each pitch above each crotchet (quarter note): you'll soon become receptive to the pattern.

EXERCISE FIVE



To help develop the physical dexterity required to deliver minor7th♭5 arpeggios, these exercises will investigate them from different perspectives. This exercise will require you to deliver the inversions in the preceding study in an alternating manner. Although this process may seem straightforward, in practice the fingering can feel alien, partly due to the presence of the ♭5 interval and the unfamiliar patterns produced as a result. Patience and perseverance are your biggest allies.

EXERCISE SIX



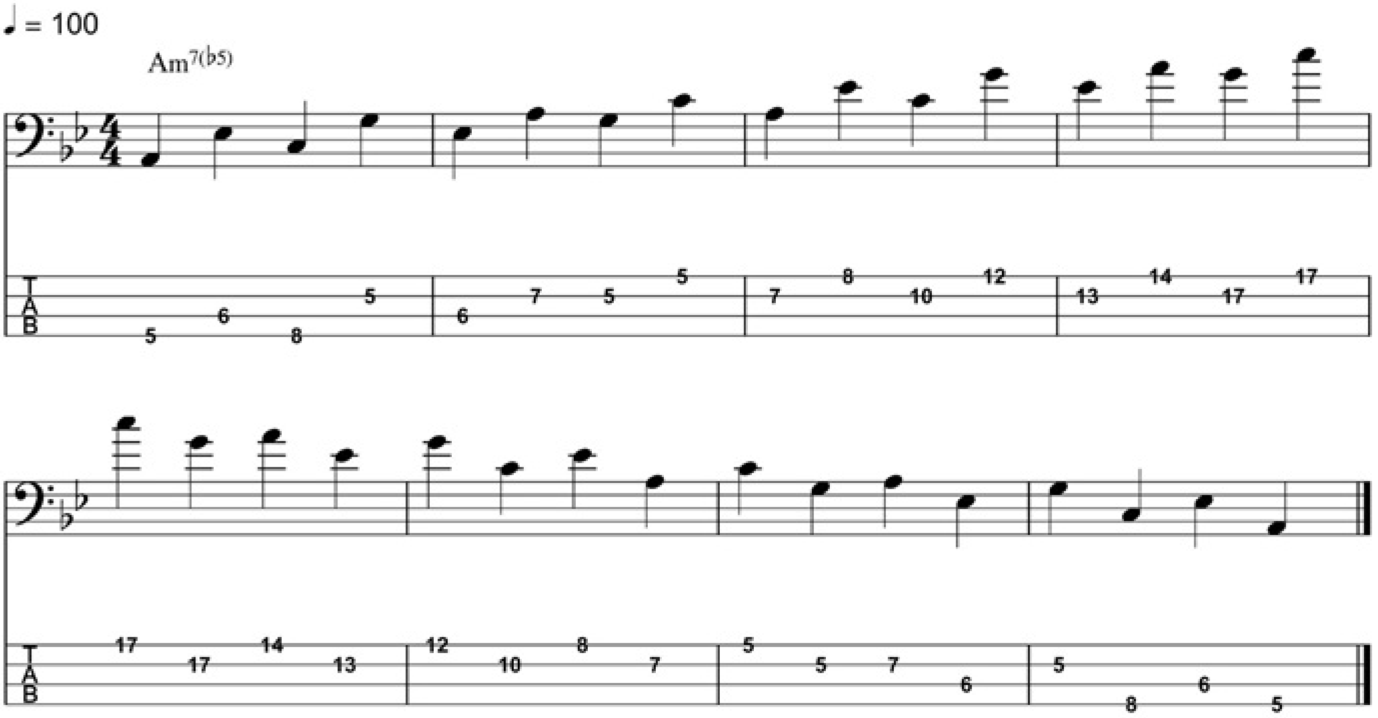
Arpeggios are customarily perceived as four-note structures, so it's habitual to deliver their content using even subdivisions. But what happens if we go against the grain and utilise odd groupings? Exercise 6 investigates this notion by delivering an A minor7th♭5 arpeggio using groupings of three notes. Commencing on the tonic, you'll be required to ascend only three notes up the arpeggio before descending the same distance from the consequent pitch. This pattern is then synthesised and duplicated over two complete octaves. It's worth noting that although it's written in a 6/8 meter, this rhythmic arrangement can easily be portrayed in 12/8, or even triplets in a 4/4-time signature.

Thom Yorke of Radiohead, playing bass in a side project, The Smile

© Jim Bennett/Redferns

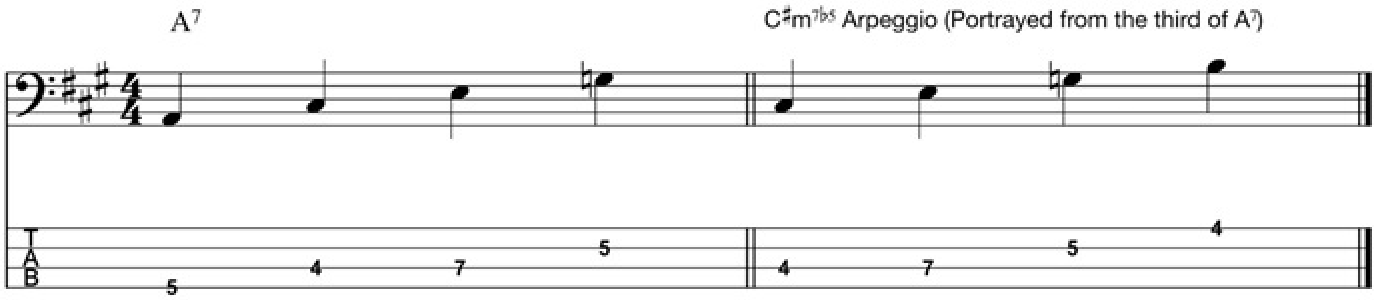
What happens if we go against the grain and utilise odd groupings?

EXERCISE SEVEN



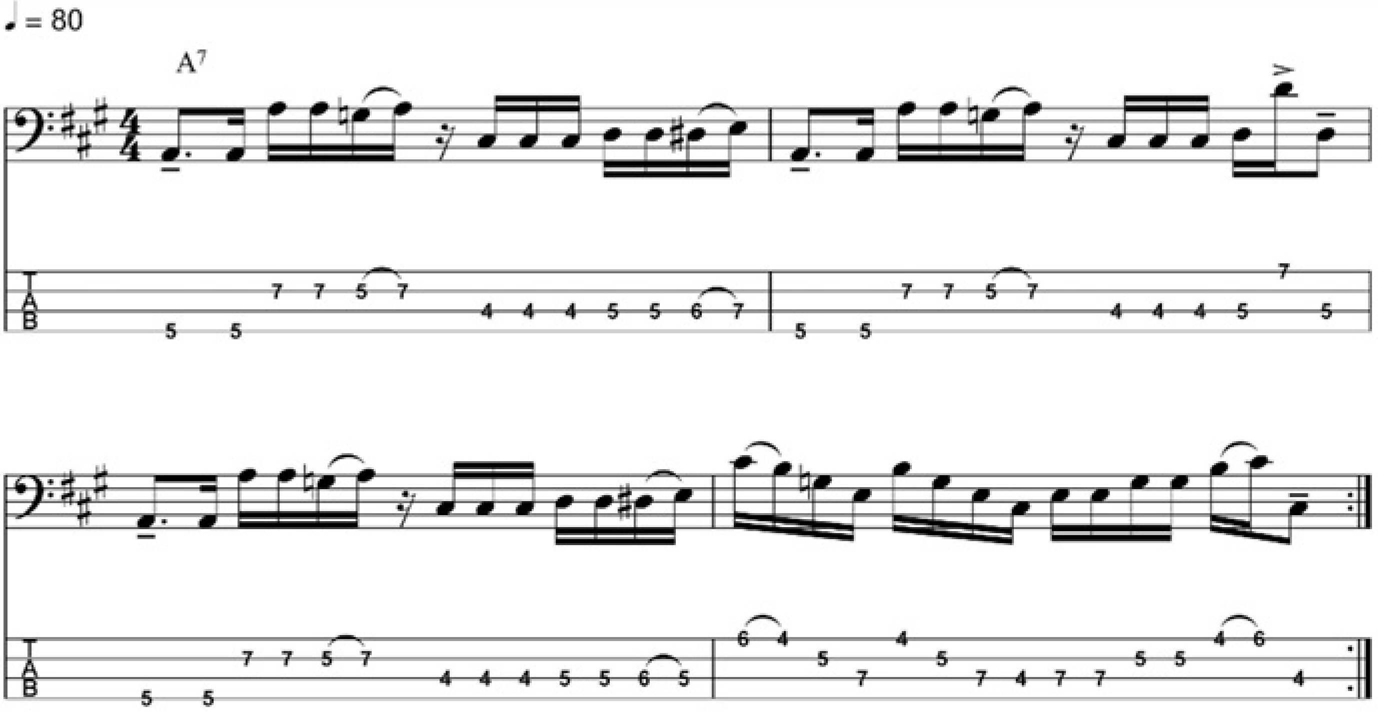
Although constructed using intervals of thirds, the manner in which the consequential pitches of an arpeggio are delivered can easily be manipulated. For instance, instead of approaching the minor7th♭5 arpeggio using a rudimental ascending and descending method, Exercise 7 will require you to play the note a diatonic 5th interval above, and below, all of the associated pitches as you transcend two octaves.

EXERCISE EIGHT



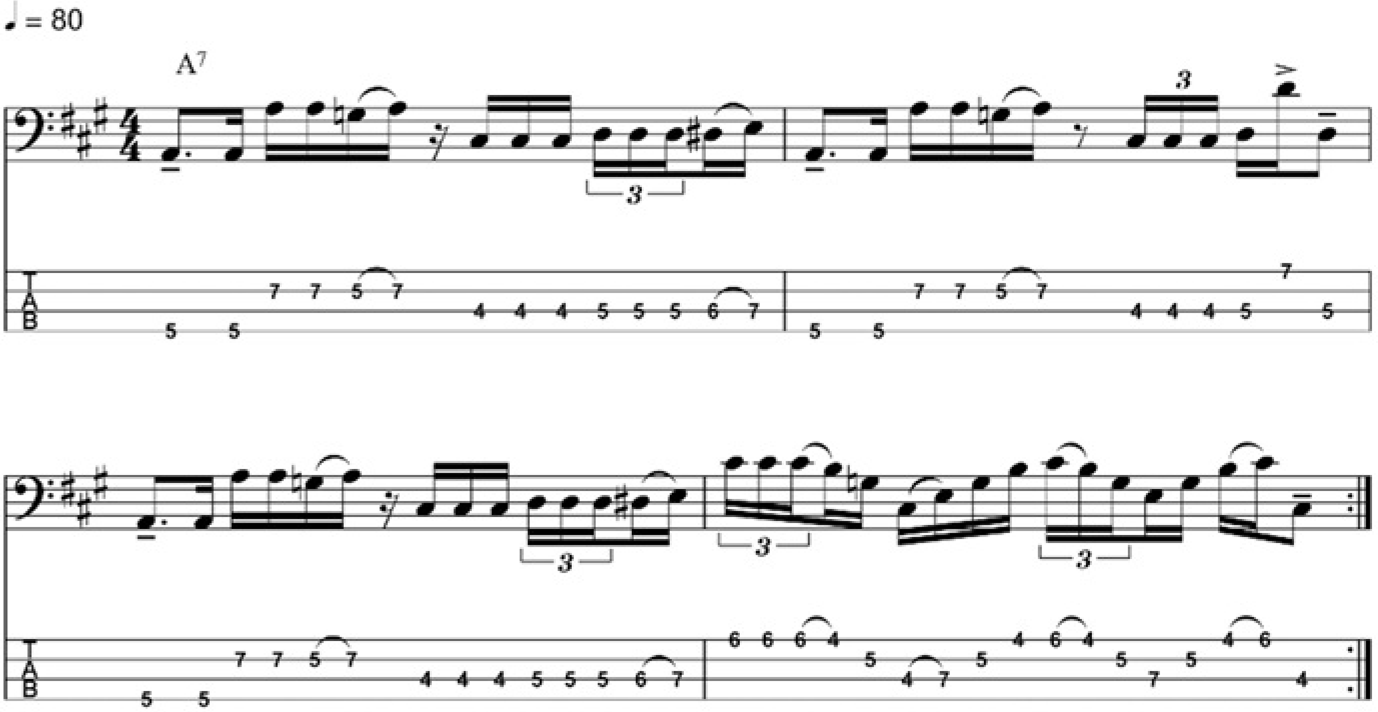
Although minor7th♭5 arpeggios seem less common than other four-note structures, their strengths aren't necessarily limited to minor II-V progressions and the seventh degree of major tonality. For example, examining the notes of an A7 arpeggio discloses the pitches: A, C#, E and G. However, when isolated C#, E and G actually produce a diminished triad... which is 75 percent of a minor7th♭5 arpeggio! Thus, playing a 'half-diminished' structure off of the 3rd of any dominant 7th chord allows access to the 3rd, 5th, 7th and 9th intervals, while simultaneously omitting the root. The result is a wonderfully inspiring and influential melodic device that can be utilised to strengthen the portrayal of all dominant vocabulary.

EXERCISE NINE



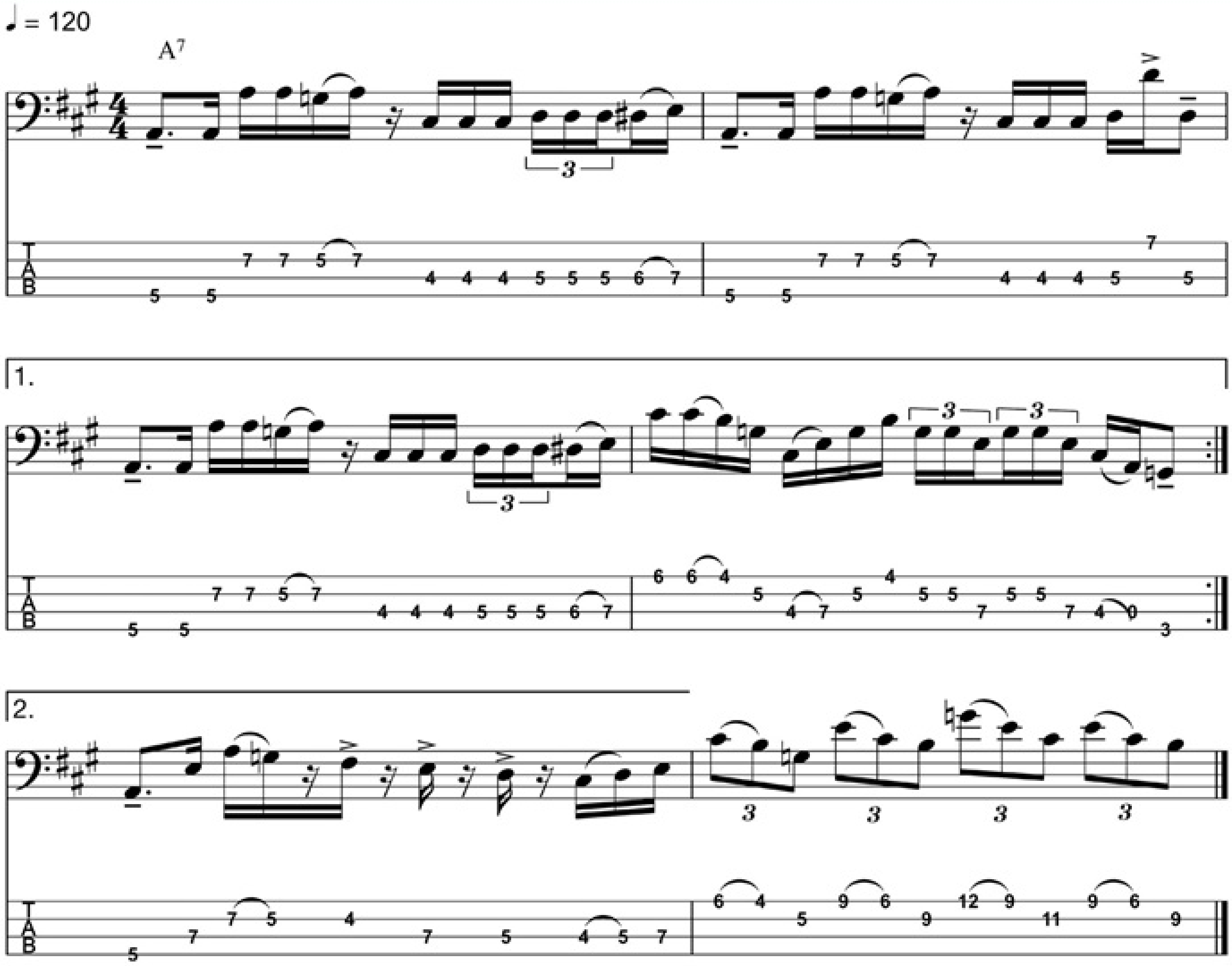
Here's a four-bar motif designed to utilise the melodic device introduced in the last exercise. For the first three measures, chord tones and chromatic vocabulary have been utilised to portray the associated A7 chord. This ostinato phrase commences on the tonic, conveyed by a dotted eighth note, which is then supplemented by an ascending slur between the ♭7th and octave, and chromaticism between the 3rd and 5th degrees. In bar four, the melody is crafted from a C# minor7th♭5 arpeggio. Placing your index finger on the fourth fret of string three will optimise your delivery of the subsequent vocabulary.

EXERCISE TEN



Expanding upon the conceptual components of the last exercise, this month's penultimate study once again addresses an A7 chord, with the help of a C#minor7th b5 arpeggio. One significant difference is the inclusion of 16th note triplets. Traditionally, 16ths are portrayed as a subdivision of four, residing evenly within the space of a single quarter note, but 16th-note triplets are an entirely different beast. They require you to divide each quarter note in half, producing two eight notes, and then deliver a triplet within each of these subsequent subdivisions.

EXERCISE ELEVEN



Exercise 11 collates all of this month's insights into a single study. Although you will once again encounter dotted rhythms, slurs and 16th notes, there are a few additional surprises to keep you on your toes, such as 8th triplets and a little syncopation. Work though each of the measures, remembering at all times that the bulk of the context is derived from insights you've already covered. Until next time!

James LoMenzo of Megadeth

© Aldara Zarraoa/Getty

If you only practise one thing this month...

Most contemporary musicians are more likely to encounter major 7th, minor 7th and dominant 7th chords on a regular basis than minor7th♭5 structures. Therefore, if you only have time to practise one thing, try to ensure you're familiar with the basic construction of a half-diminished arpeggio and are able to identify where the structure is within diatonic major harmony.

Ace bass educator Stuart Clayton takes us deep into the work of Stu Hamm for an advanced masterclass.

AND FINALLY...

STU HAMM: CHORDS LESSON

Welcome back! In the last issue we looked at chordal fingerstyle playing, an area of bass technique that offers some alternative perspectives on the combination of harmony and melody. In the previous instalment, we looked closely at the technique and worked through 10 exercises that put it to use. If you've worked through that material successfully, you're ready for the next challenge.

This month, we're looking at an entire piece that was performed using the chordal fingerstyle technique. 'Chordally Yours' was written by virtuoso bassist Stuart Hamm and is part of his *Le Petit Suite For Solo Bass*, a series of solo bass pieces written to illustrate the versatility of the instrument. You'll find this piece on Stuart's 2015 album *The Book Of Lies.*

"Chords are a great tool that you can use in your solo bass vocabulary," says Hamm. "When writing this piece my aim was to include every permutation of chord that I could think of, so that you'll be learning new shapes and fingerings while also learning to perform a beautiful piece of music. We'll be using some different fingerstyle techniques here as well, while paying attention to phrasing and dynamics again. I hope this piece leads you on a journey to writing your own solo pieces using chords."

PART A

When playing the Intro (at letter A), the chords are initially arpeggiated across the A, D and G-strings. It is recommended that you use the thumb of the picking hand for the A-string (and later, the E-string), the first finger for the D-string and the second for the G-string. When playing this part, you should allow all notes to ring into one another, as this is usually the desired effect of using this technique.

After ascending the neck during the first eight bars, a descending sequence of augmented triads is played in bars 9 to 12. Augmented triads are made up of two stacked major third intervals, which results in an augmented fifth interval between the root note and the fifth. The first augmented triad is E+, played with the E at the nineteenth fret of the A-string, the G# at the eighteenth fret of the D-string and the C at the seventeenth fret of the G-string. This figure (or shape) is played twice, then descends down the neck, following the whole tone scale. You'll hear that augmented triads – and the whole tone scale with which they are frequently used – have a unique sound.

PART B

At letter B the main melody section begins. The first time through (bars 13 to 20) it is predominantly played with two-note chord voicings. Over an open A, various voicings of an A minor triad are played. Bars 15 and 16 hint at a Lydian-flavoured chord (Fmaj7#11), which will be fleshed out more fully later in the piece.

In bars 17 and 18 we have three-note chords that feature some difficult minor sixth intervals. In bar 17, I recommend fretting the A with the second finger, the E with the fourth and the F (a minor sixth above the A) with the first finger. These notes should be arpeggiated quickly, as indicated by the arpeggiation direction next to the chord. The same fingering can be used for the chord at the beginning of bar 18, which is the same voicing a fourth lower.

In bars 21 to 28, the melody is played again, but with embellishments to make it bigger and louder. First of all, the initial voicing of A minor is arpeggiated using the chordal fingerstyle technique. Next, a full voicing of Fmaj7#11 is used in the third bar of the sequence (bar 23). Fret this as follows: first finger on the F, second on the E, third on the C, fourth on the B. This chord resolves to an Fadd9 chord in the following bar that should be fretted as follows: F with the first finger, A with the second, C with the third, G with the fourth.

When playing these chord note voicings, use the thumb to play the notes on the E and A-strings, the first finger for notes on the D-string and the second finger for notes on the G-string. These chords are followed by a B♭maj7 chord in bar 25, after which a ii–V–I progression in Bb is played: Cm7–F7–B♭^7. This progression, common in jazz, is something that most bass players should be familiar with.

Unusually, the B♭maj7 then moves to E7, which in turn then resolves to A minor. This is a nice sequence, one that illustrates how effective three-note chord voicings can be on the bass. Note that when playing three-note voicings such as these, the fifth is

> **"I hope this piece leads you on a journey to writing your own solo pieces using chords"**
> *Stuart Hamm*

© Richard Ecclestone/Redferns

© Richard Ecclestone/Redferns

The master at work.

usually omitted as it is the most 'expendable' note of the chord.

PART C

At letter C, four-note chords are played, one note per string. The first of these, C, is arpeggiated and is followed by a simple ascending tenth line. In the next four bars, the previous C chord voicing is embellished, with the octave note moving upwards to the ninth of the chord. I recommend fretting this with the first finger on the C, the second on the E, the third on the G and the fourth on the D. The same fingering can then be used for the Fadd9 chord that follows it.

I recommend the following fingering for the awkward D7/F# chord in bar 40: play the F# with the first finger, the D with the third, the octave F# with the second and the C with the fourth. Similarly, the G7sus and G7 chords in bars 41 to 44 must be fretted in a particular way. For the G7sus, fret the G with the first finger, the D with the third, the F with the second and the C with the fourth. When this chord changes to G7, you have two options: you can either move the fourth finger down to B, or if you find this uncomfortable, switch to the following position: first finger on the G, fourth on the D, second on the F and third on the B. Switching between these two positions will require some practice.

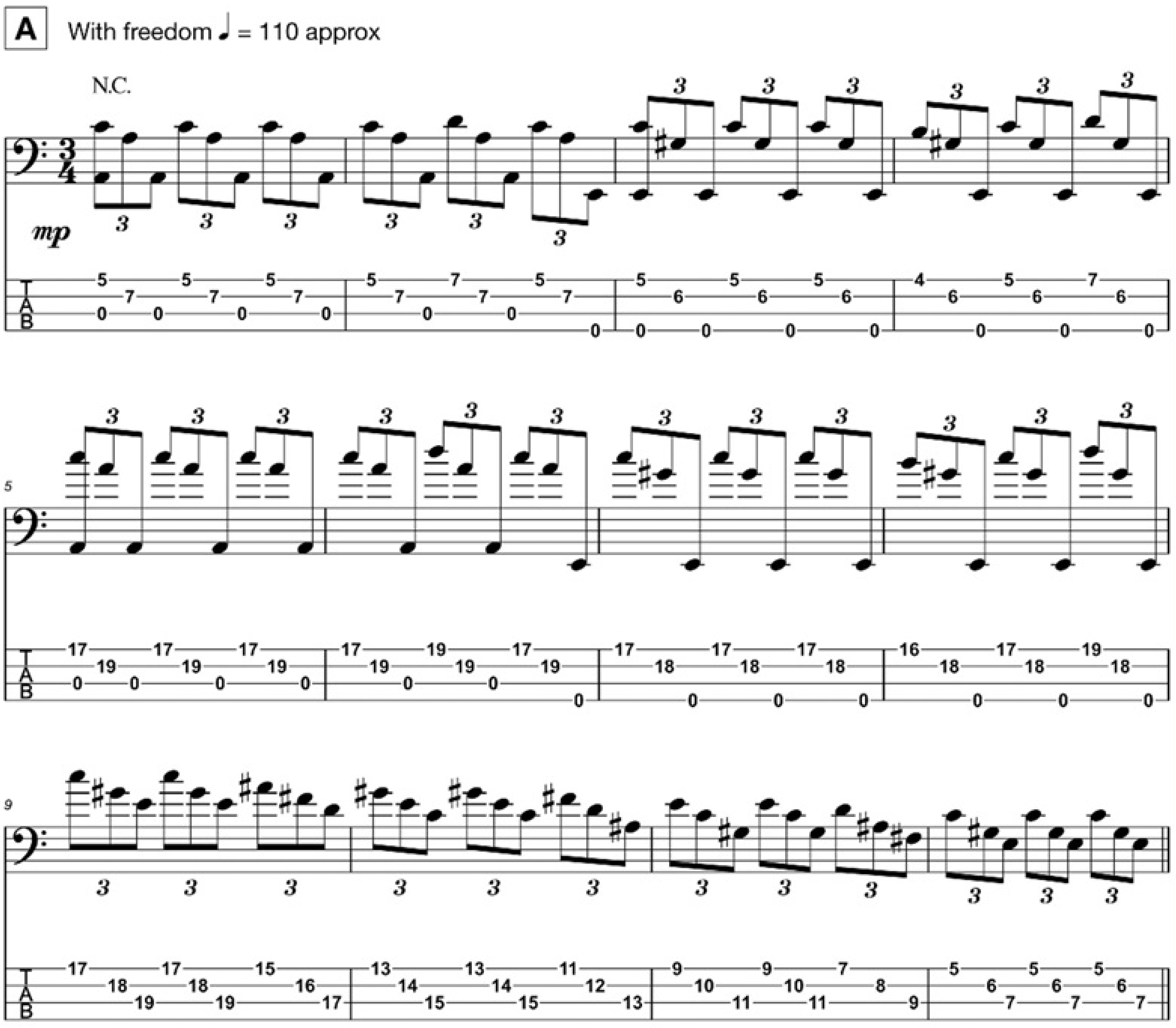
PART D

At D a new section begins, outlining more four-note chords. You will have used the first two voicings earlier in the piece, but the Dm7/C should be played as follows: second finger on the F, fourth on the C, first on the D and third on the A. This section is played four times, and Stuart suggests that it could be looped for a solo when playing live if desired.

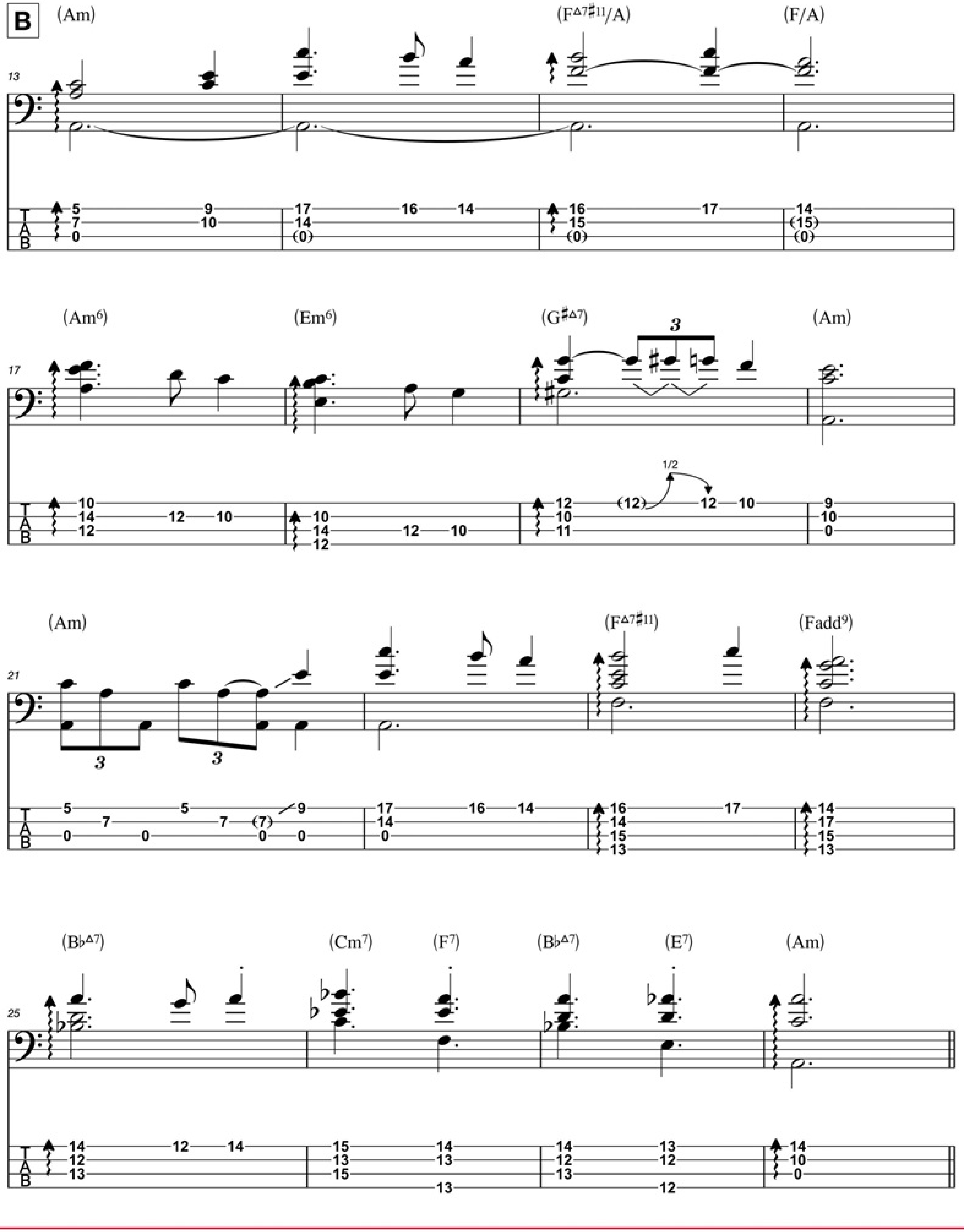
PART E AND ONWARDS

The remainder of the piece consists of repetition of earlier sections. The very best of luck, and let us know how you get on!

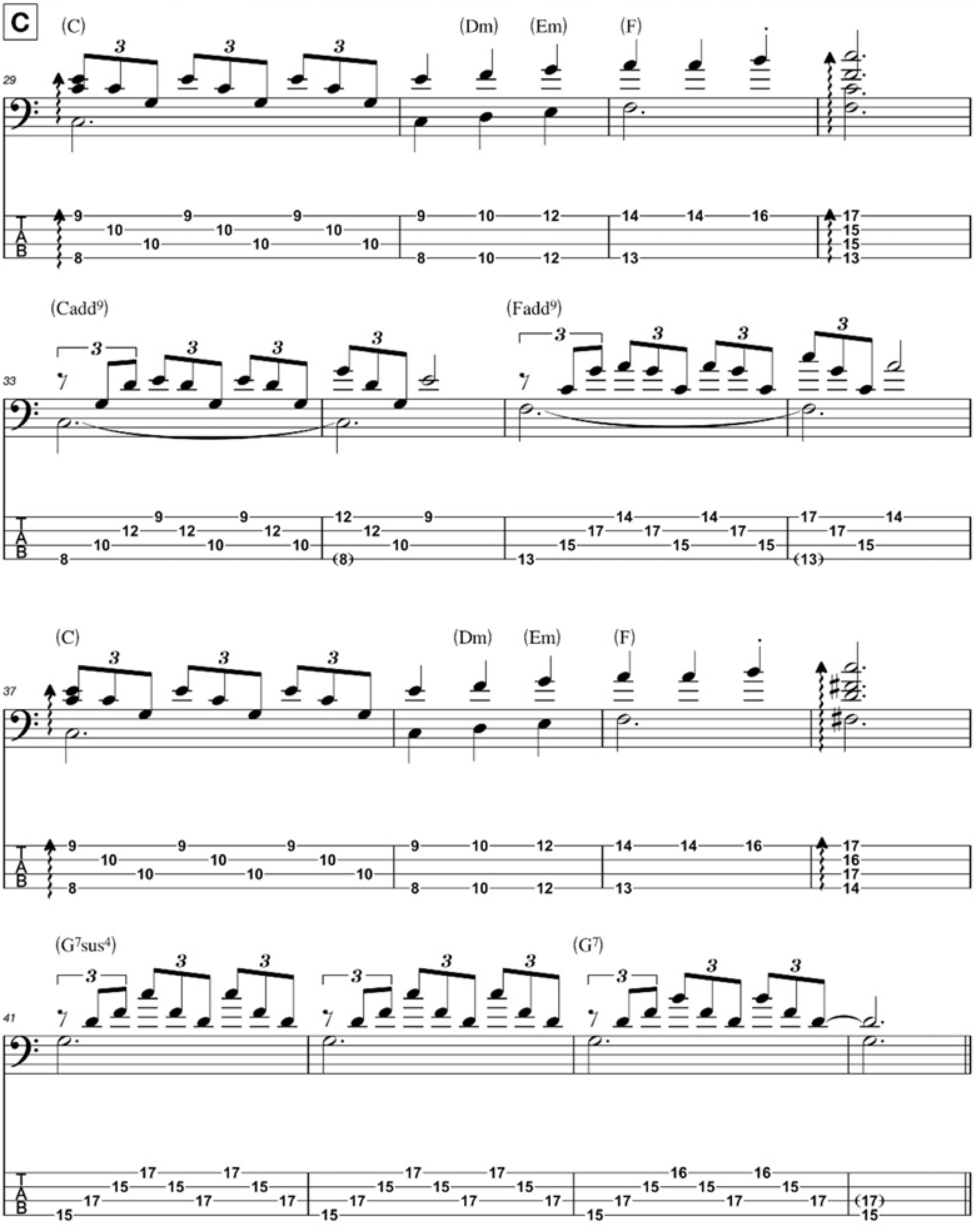
PART A



PART B



PART C



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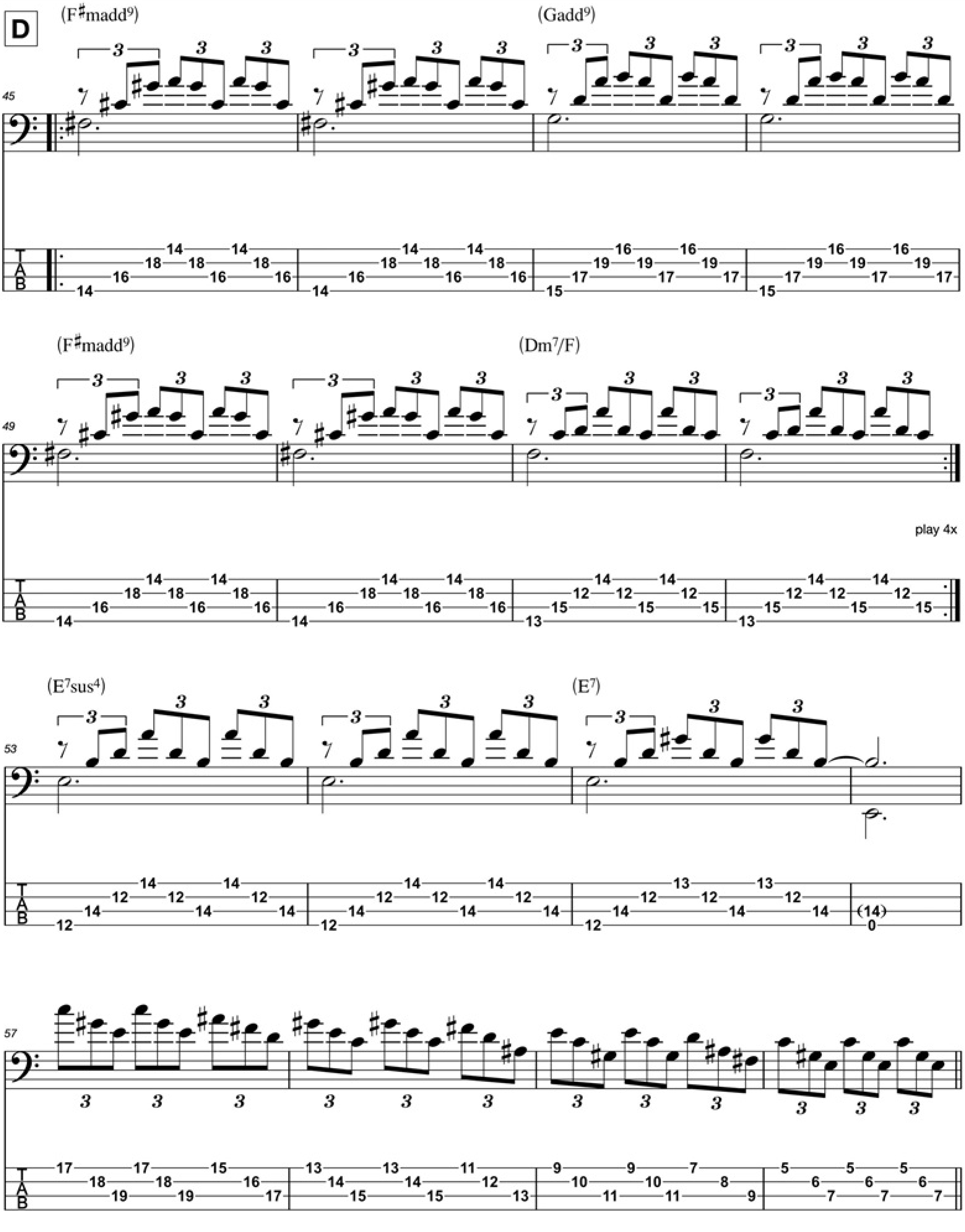

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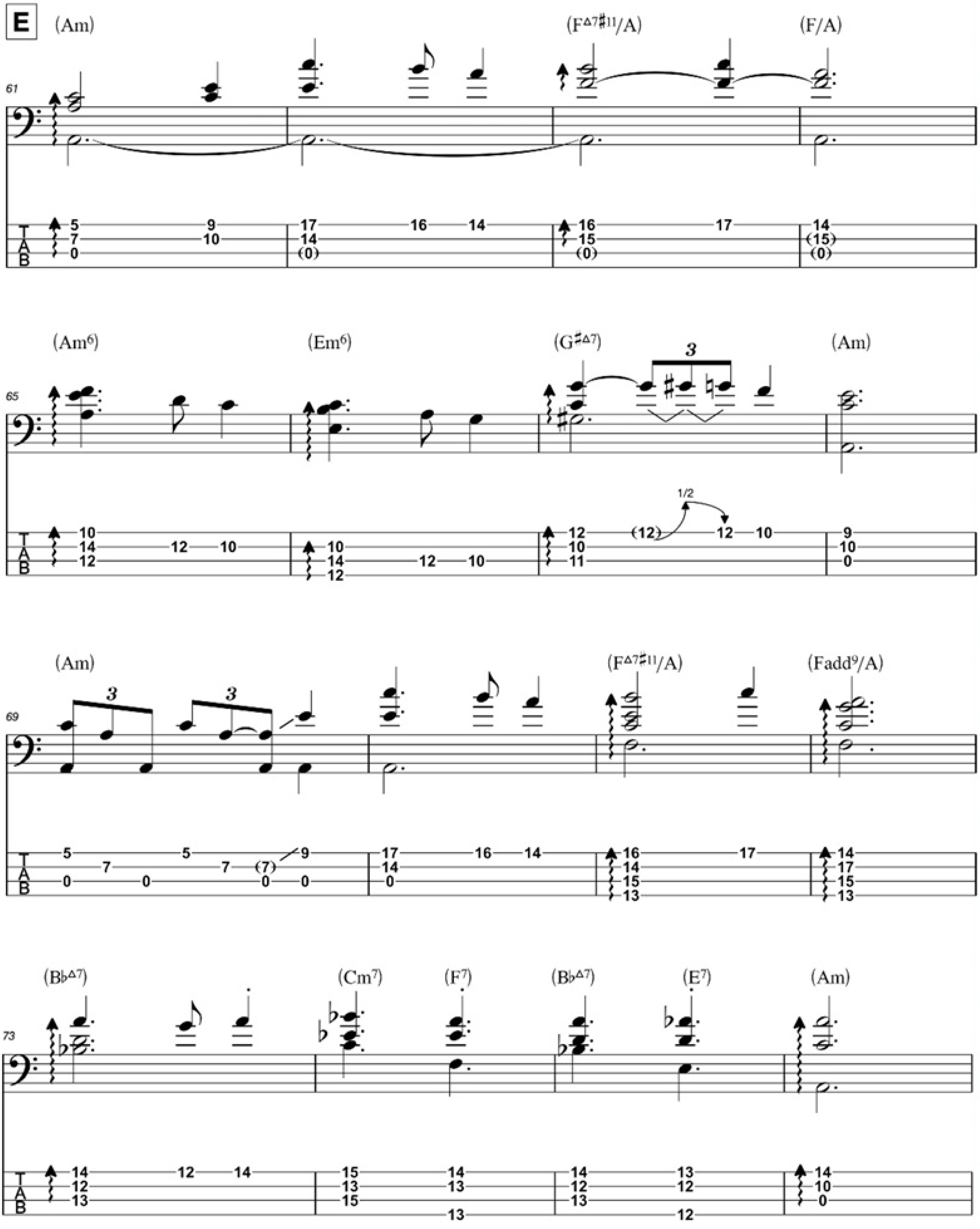

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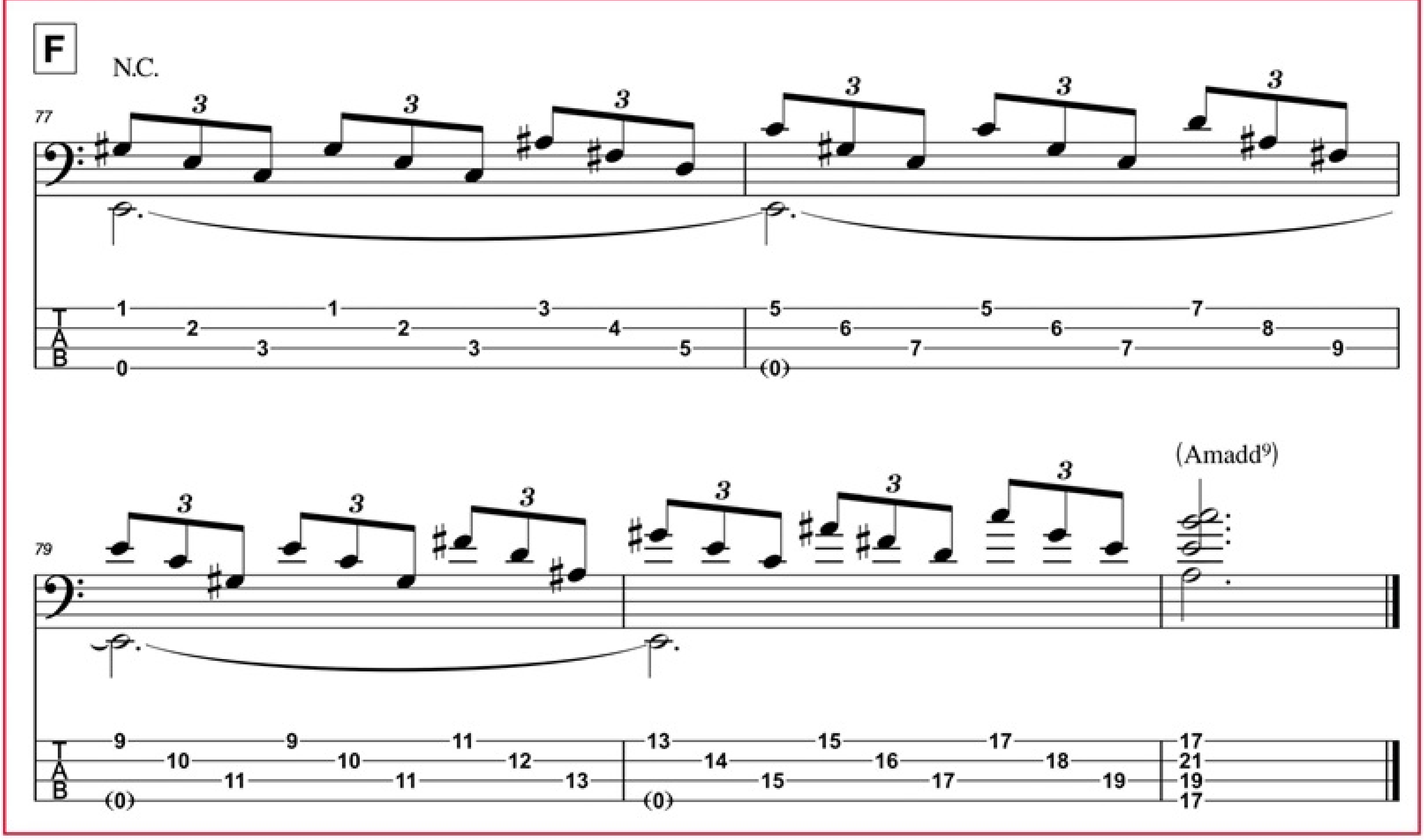

Stu with the mighty Joe Satriani in 1989.

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DIGITECH XBW

A lean, green, fighting machine

Dan Veall is a session and stage bass player, educator and gear expert and is here to answer your questions. Contact: @DanVeallBassist

The Digitech XBW Bass Synth Wah Envelope Filter, to give it is full name, has achieved icon status in our world, having been at the foot of many a bass player the world around. Using Nineties digital signal processing technology, Digitech shoe-horned not one but seven filter effects in to this cute, green, all-metal casing.

Why on earth are we looking at this uncool dinosaur?
Any "uncool" pedal that more than doubles in value after its demise is worth looking into. We need to find out why!

Does it sound good?
Well, the XBW is capable of a respectable frequency response. From my investigations, I have discovered that it processes at 24bit 44.1Khz, with 16bit 44.1Khz being CD quality, for people who still buy them. Featuring a Harman brand Audio DNA DSP chip, this pedal shares its design with the guitar version, the XSW Synth Wah. The fundamental difference here is the DSP programming which produces the bass-centric effects. All of this technical wizardry doesn't guarantee a great-sounding pedal, of course. With modern DSP, the algorithms running have as much to do with the resultant sound as the physical electronics of an analogue pedal... are you still there?

Sorry, I fell asleep. You're using too much technical jargon.
Well, listen up, idiot. The octave effect is convincing, but as with many analogue pedals, watch your playing to ensure good tracking and stay away from the low bass notes or you may unleash some wobbly noises.

This page is a wobbly noise.
Shut your piehole! Some XBW sounds should probably be reserved for the more 'out there' moments in your set. There's some undeniable funk in there, especially that quacky envelope filter sound we all know and love. The XBW's performance has its foibles, compared to modern DSP. Sometimes the tracking is a tad suspect, and online reviews leave me with the feeling that overall, the XBW is either loved or hated. Yet in the right hands, it can produce some iconic sounds.

So how do you use it?
The right-hand knob on the pedal selects between five different effect types across seven positions. We're treated to an envelope filter, also available with octave, two synth sound patches, two filter sounds and an octave effect. The processor handles assigning of parameters to the Control and Range knobs per effect, while the Sens knob affects the trigger of the filter effects. Two outputs mean you can mix both dry and wet effected sounds elsewhere in the chain and hidden away from view. You can also enable a 4x10 cabinet emulation circuit.

"In the right hands, this pedal can produce some iconic sounds."

What do the experts say?
We asked Tom Bowlus of *Bass Gear* that very question, and he said: "The Digitech Bass Synth Wah is lots of fun, occasionally frustrating, and definitely has its own personality. With the 'right' settings, it is nicely touch-responsive. One thing it is not is subtle: this is not an effect to use when you want to nudge your tone in one direction or the other without calling for undue attention. This thing screams for attention! For many bass synth sounds, I find that I prefer my Deep Impact or Boss SY-1, but for some funky/trippy/ octave tones, I find that the Bass Synth Wah can take me places I can't go with any other pedal."

So where do I get one?
Well, hold up there, fella. Sadly, the XBW is no longer produced: you'll find the price of second-hand examples climbing faster than the proverbial go-go juice for your car these days. It's nearly 30 years since it was released, so it finds itself squarely in the Vintage category.

A bit like you, then.
Be quiet. I was reading recently that Cor-Tek, which owns Cort, has acquired Digitech and DOD. So maybe we'll see a reissue in the future. Here's hoping!

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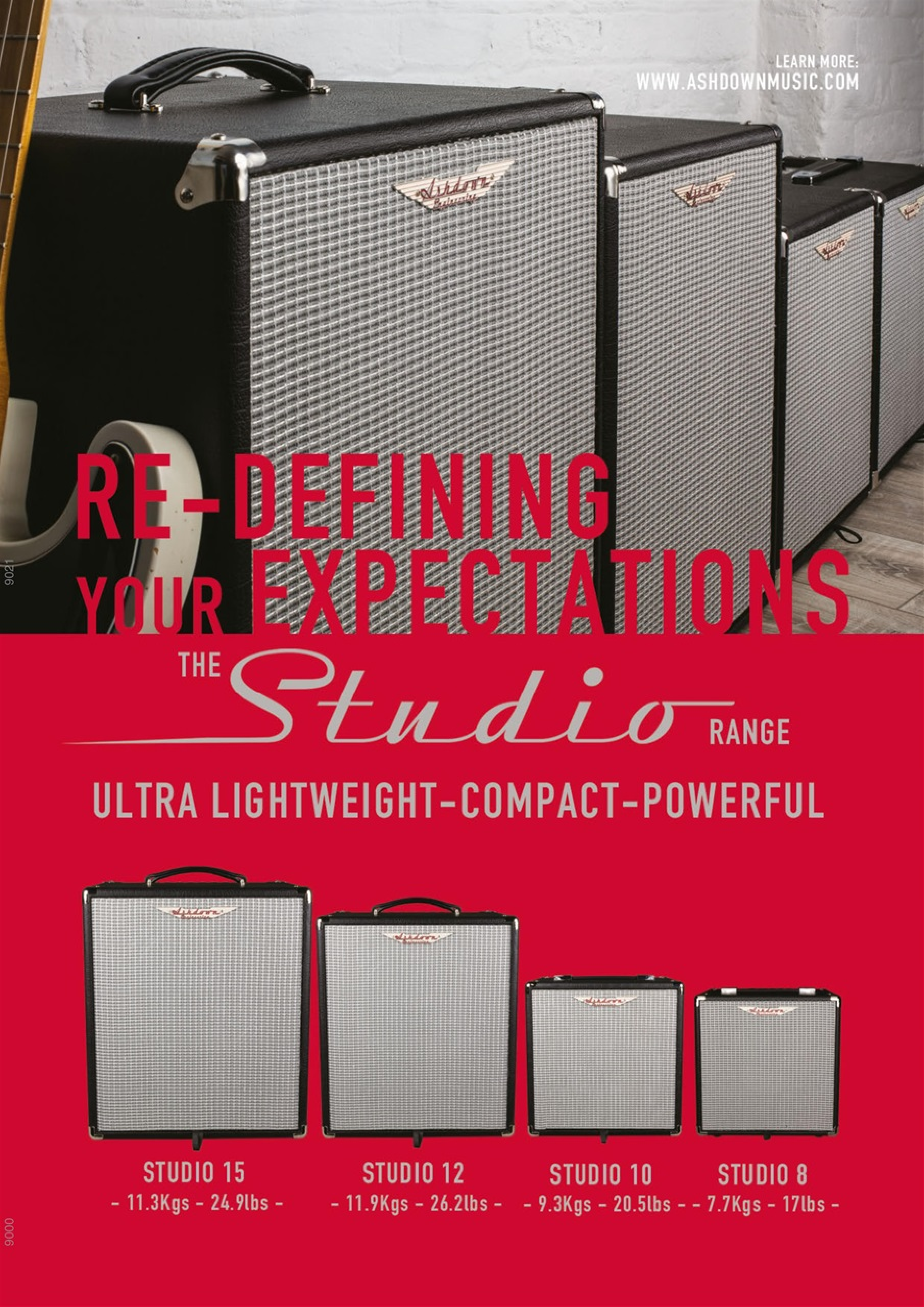
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